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An Analysis of Probate Inventories from the Runcorn Area *1602 - 1766*

**Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of
Liverpool in part fulfilment of the modular programme in Landscape, Heritage and
Society.**

Brian Richard Howman, October 1999

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I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions within the body of this work.

Brian Howman

Inventories used in this study bear the Call Number prefixes WS (for Wills Supra) and WI (for Wills Infra). Wills Infra are those of estates totalling less than £40, and Wills Supra, of estates totalling more than £40. However, The classification of these documents as WS, or WI is inconsistent. Therefore, in the interests of clarity, documents are referred to by their actual call number, regardless of whether its total value indicates it ought to be classified differently. Years in parentheses, given after a testator's name in the text, refer to the year of death and may differ from those in the document's Call Number (for example, WS 1677), which refer to the year the probate inventory came to court.

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Abstract

This dissertation is a qualitative, rather than quantitative analysis of one hundred and one probate inventories from the Runcorn area, dating from 1602, to 1766. It aims to assess three main themes; the relationship between non-élite people and their physical surroundings; their relationships with each other; and the level and nature of the area's isolation from other regions. Results of work carried out on probate inventories from other parts of the country are used to provide comparisons to conclusions drawn from the local inventories.

The opening chapter provides a brief historical background. Evidence from contemporary sources is used to illustrate the local landscape of the period, and broad, perceptions of Runcorn's history are considered and challenged here. In chapter 2, artisans' retention of agricultural interests is addressed, alongside the level of yeomens' diversification into other economic areas than farming. Conclusions drawn here help illustrate the similarities between the economic activity local non-élites', and those elsewhere. Chapter 3 addresses the issues of debt and investment, widows, and low valued inventories. The evidence from these 'exceptional' inventories helps provide a picture of tensions within the local community, as well as a snapshot of the domestic arrangements of some of its poorer members. The final chapter examines the contents and functions of rooms within non-élite homes. Evidence is found which indicates a later evolution in domestic practices, suggesting a certain level of insulation from outside forces. Conversely, ownership patterns of certain goods indicate a significant level of communication with other areas.

The appendices contain a list of the inventories used (including testators' occupations and home township), and three charts, showing their distribution, by decade, occupation, and settlement.

Introduction

It is the intention of this dissertation to examine and compare probate inventories from a cluster of relatively secluded North Cheshire settlements, and attempt to draw conclusions about the relationship between 'ordinary' people and their physical environment during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Probate inventories from townships around modern Runcorn, including Higher Runcorn, Weston and Halton, will be considered alongside the findings of studies carried out on probate inventories from other areas, including Norwich, Telford, Yorkshire, mid-Essex and Stockport.

Much of the work already carried out on probate inventories is of a statistical nature; for instance, tracking inflation, comparing livestock and crop values, or providing material for standardised summaries. Whilst not wishing to disparage against this kind of work (indeed, it is unlikely that these methods can be entirely ignored), it is not the aim of this study to provide a statistical analysis, but rather to glean some idea of the lives of non-élite members of society in pre and proto-industrial North Cheshire. This approach is more in keeping with that of John Moore, who argues:

Often the exceptional detail or oddity, necessarily omitted in such summaries, can be as illuminating as the mass of figures. By all means let us count so long as what we are counting is worth counting: but let us not assume, as so many quantitative and economic historians seem to, that only what can be counted is worthy of study.¹

By examining their contents, this study will aim to ascertain the functions of butteries and parlours, where they occur on the inventories from the sample, and attempt to monitor any changes in their use that occur during our period, comparing developments with those of the same rooms in other areas. It will be seen that probate inventories, which name these rooms, reveal the buttery losing its original, specific

purpose of storing provisions (especially drink) and becoming a general provisions and utensil store, and the parlour becoming a dining room, instead of the all-purpose bed-sitting room it had hitherto been. These changes in the functions of rooms indicate a fair degree of modernisation and extension of dwellings and illustrate evolving domestic arrangements,² reflecting the ongoing transition in the area's social and economic situation. How quickly these developments take place in the Runcorn area, compared with elsewhere, will hopefully help illustrate the extent to which the local non-élite were disconnected from regional and national trends.

W.G. Hoskins states that 'most craftsmen were also small farmers,'³ and it will be seen that from their probate inventories, that a high percentage of artisans and tradesmen in the Runcorn area were involved in agriculture, owning livestock, crops and farming equipment. This study will aim to ascertain to what extent people retained an agricultural interest, during a period when opportunities for trade were beginning to grow in the area. Further to this, it is hoped that the level of farmers' involvement in areas of commerce other than farming may be assessed, as growing trade created new opportunities for investment and diversification. Did the relatively powerful yeomen retain their status during this period of economic change? If so, did they do so by branching out into other areas of commerce, and to what extent?

In order to provide a balanced picture of non-élite society, attention will be paid to inventories from the lower end of the scale. The above changes in room use and furnishing may be more difficult to detect, but, once detected, ought to prove equally illustrative. In this vein, particular attention will be paid to probate inventories with very low values. There is little evidence (either in the landscape, or elsewhere) to illustrate the

lives of the poor during this period, and although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to give any kind of 'voice' to these people, it will be possible to gain an idea of how their poverty manifested itself, and some of the extra pressures they faced..

As with the very poor, there is little evidence of the activities and rôle of women during this period. Therefore, all women's probate inventories included will be scoured for any evidence they may offer. It will be seen that though it appears that widows commonly found it difficult to make a living, following their husbands' deaths, it was not impossible for a widow to increase the value of the estate she inherited. Whilst it would be inadvisable to draw conclusions for the whole area, or whole period, from such a small sample (only ten of the total sample of one hundred and one inventories belonged to widows), it will be interesting to examine how different circumstances dictated their economic wellbeing, and what measures widows could take, in order to secure some form of income, including the practice of usury.

As stated above, exceptional probate inventories (either in detail or subject) can be very illuminating. Only a minority of inventories from the sample give details of debts owed to and by the deceased, but those that do will be of great value. Information concerning who owed how much, to whom, and for what reason, will add detail to the bigger picture, and give further clues to the commercial (and other) activities of individuals, as well as hopefully providing a snapshot of political and social life at parish, or village level. In the same vein investments will be considered. It is often very difficult to differentiate between investments and simple trade debts,⁴ but there are examples in the sample, which definitely indicate that the deceased had (occasionally considerable) investments. Others list their debtors' (and creditors') names, and state the goods or

services provided. The nature of these debts and investments will be compared to trends in other areas, in order to detect any similarities, or differences between the Runcorn area and other parts of the country.

This dissertation will (albeit with an unequal weighting) address the three strands of the MA programme, Landscape, Heritage and Society. The relationship between ordinary people and their physical surroundings will be examined alongside their interaction with each other and local society at large. These themes, alongside considerations of the area's level of economic and social isolation will comprise the main body of the dissertation. The 'heritage' aspect may appear to be little more than an aside to the other two, but it would be impossible to focus on an area such as this without commenting on the dearth of surviving evidence in the local built environment of the community, which occupied the area in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and which was to be radically, and swiftly, altered by the massive industrial growth, and much improved transport links of the late eighteenth century.

Noted to Introduction

¹ J.S. Moore, 'Probate Inventories: Problems and Prospects' in Riden, P (ed.) *Probate Records and the Local Community* (Gloucester, 1985), p. 21.

² P.C.D. Brears, Introduction to Brears, P.C.D. (ed.) *Yorkshire Probate Inventories 1542-1689* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1985), pp. x-xi; U. Priestly, & P.J. Corfield, 'Rooms and Room Use in Norwich Housing', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 16 (1982), pp. 107-12.

³ W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (second edition, London, 1972), p. 155.

⁴ Trinder and Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, (London, 1980), p. 18.

CHAPTER – 1

Historical Background

It may appear at first glance, that very little happened, during our period in the Runcorn area, to disrupt the established rural pattern of life for the local non-élite members of society, until the industry-driven expansion, which immediately followed; and that the area remained isolated from mainstream Cheshire, until Runcorn's emergence as a port and manufacturing centre in the late eighteenth century. Visitors to Runcorn today (and indeed, many of the town's inhabitants) could be forgiven for believing that the town's history stretches back only as far as end of the eighteenth century and Britain's canal boom. This view is reinforced by Michael Reed who asserts that Runcorn was an entirely new town created by the canals.¹ Whilst surrounding settlements (such as Halton and Weston) have an accepted antiquity, supported by their entries in *Domesday*, Runcorn's absence from *Domesday* may lead one to suppose that the town does not have a similarly long history. This is not the case; Halton, Weston and another thirty two townships, as far away as Thelwall, were, at the time of *Domesday*, all part of the ancient parish of Runcorn.

During the reigns of Alfred and his son Edward the Elder, Runcorn occupied a strategically important position on the banks of the River Mersey, and a stronghold (Runcorn Burgh, one of a line of forts from Chester to Manchester) was built as a defence against Viking raiders from Ireland and the Isle of Man, by King Edward and his sister, Ethelfleda, in 915.² The distribution of Scandinavian place names (plentiful to the west of Runcorn, for example Helsby, Frankby and Irby, but rare throughout the rest of Cheshire) is perhaps testament to the success of Runcorn Burgh in containing Viking expansion, but

little evidence survives of its history, and the site was effectively destroyed by the cutting of the Duke's Gut (to improve navigation to the Bridgewater Canal), in the 1780s, and then by the construction of the Britannia railway bridge in 1863.³ The Burgh remained in the collective local memory for several hundred years, however, as one Sampson Erdeswicke wrote in 1574:

By West Halton uppon the river of Mersee a myle from Halton, standeth Runcorne, which in times past was a greate towne and had a strong castell called Runcolan which was kept with a strong garrison for the scourge of the inhabitants of Northumberland.⁴

Whilst the above certainly exaggerates the scale of Runcorn's earlier importance, it does provide a clue that the town had once been more significant in earlier times. This is reinforced by John Leland, the sixteenth century traveller, who wrote 'Haulton Castel buildid by Randol Erle of Chestre. It standeth abowt the side of the Mersey, within a myle of his banke, and within a mile of Runcorn, now a poor townlet by a salt creke.'⁵ Leland's use of the word 'now' suggests that Runcorn had previously enjoyed some level of importance in the area, but had since declined.

It seems that during the middle ages, Runcorn had begun to develop into a prosperous maritime community, only to be stifled by Edward IV, who, at the behest of the burgesses of Chester, granted the city a monopoly of Cheshire's trade with Ireland (despite severe problems navigating the silted -up River Dee), and ordered the arrest of all vessels attempting to discharge cargoes from Ireland at Runcorn.⁶ Further evidence of Runcorn's previous importance is that the Mersey estuary from Runcorn to Liverpool was known in the mid sixteenth century as 'Runcorn Water.'⁷

Whilst there may be some dispute as to the level of activity in the Runcorn area in centuries preceding our period, there can be no doubt that by the seventeenth century,

Runcorn and its surrounding settlements were largely isolated and of limited significance.

This is shown by a description of the area in Daniel King's *The Vale Royal of England, or The County Palatine of Cheshire*. Describing the area (part of the Bucklow Hundred) in 1656, King wrote:

Not amiss may it seem to begin our view of this Hundred at *Weston*, a Lordship that hath long belonged to the Lords of *Dutton*. And so we next behold the magnificent Fabrick of *Rock Savage*, which, as you approach neer to it, fills your eye with delight at its beauty. Never since its foundation was it more graced, than when our gracious Sovereign (King James) accepted, with his train, the princely entertainment of Sir Thomas savage; His Royal Majesty taking his repast there, and killing a Buck in *Halton Park*. This stately house was built by *Sir John Savage*, whose mansion before was *Clifton*, a seat of great antiquity, the remains thereof stand in the park, like an aged matron, well contented to go to her grace, having seen in her lifetime her daughter advanced to such honourable dignity.

We behold from hence, upon the hill beyond *Rock Savage*, the town and castle of *Halton*. The Castle is still a goodly piece of bulding, and was at first fit to be both the dwelling and safe hold of a great commander. The founder was either, *Hugh Lupus*, first *Norman* Earl of *Chester*, or else Nigellus, to whom Lupus gave this when he made him Constable of *Chester*. By his posterity, this castle came afterwards to the house of *Lancaster*, and remains yet a principal member of that great Dutchie. Beyond this stands *Runcorn*, where now we see nothing but a fair Parish Church a Parsonage, ans a few scattered tenements; there was sometimes a religious house of great receipt, the foundation of *Elfreda*, that noble *Mercian* Lady, who here and elsewhere did such wondrous works.

And so we step to *Norton*, a goodly and fruitful demean; where *William* son of *Nigel* above-mentioned, founded the Abbey of Norton, and richly endowed the same; which afterwards came to the possession of the *Brookes*, a worthy race of most antient gentlemen, and now belongs to *Sir Richard Brooke, Kt.*, a man of much esteem for many worthy ventures, whose grand-father, the first owner, after the dissolution of the Abbey, was *Sir Richard Brooke*, a valient Knight of the Rhodes, discended from the *Brookes* of Leighton, in the Namptwich Hundred.

Next this is *Stockham*; and towards the Mersey, we take notice of *Keckwick*, and of that Spacious Vale called the Moor; there we see *Acton Grange*, some of the pretty dairy plots that belonged to the Abbot.⁸

By the beginning of our period, Runcorn had been in decline for a little over a hundred years, by the end of it, the massive expansion, fuelled by industrial growth, was still to manifest itself fully, and the area was almost entirely given over to agriculture

(both arable and pastoral), thinly populated, and with a small number of great houses, and a minor Leet Court at Halton Castle.

During the Civil War of the seventeenth Century, the Runcorn area was of some strategic importance. West of Warrington, the only routes across the Mersey were the ferry at Runcorn Gap, and Hale Ford (between the villages of Hale and Weston), which, because of the military activity in Lancashire and Cheshire, was in constant use. The area's loyalties in the civil War were split, the Brookes at Norton were the first North Cheshire family to declare for Parliament, whilst nearby Halton Castle housed Earl Rivers' Royalist garrison. In September 1642, Earl Rivers made preparations for war at Rock Savage, whilst Henry Brooke, towards the end of the same year took measures to defend his house, and, in February 1643, with a force of around eighty servants and tenants managed to repel a surprise attack by Earl Rivers.

We may expect that leading local families, such as the Brookes and Savages, would have been involved in important events, but perhaps not the lesser yeomen, artisans and labourers (other than fighting on their masters' behalf) . However, there is evidence that significant regional, and national, forces were impacting on the lives of the non-élite members of local society. By 1644, the Parliamentarians had established military control over the area and those people known to remain loyal to the King were liable to have their property confiscated. Amongst those who lost land to the sequestration committee, was a Runcorn yeoman, Thomas Cooper, who had to pay a fine of £80 before he could repossess his property.⁹ Fortunately, Thomas Cooper's probate inventory survives (see figure1) and from it we can see that he was a yeoman of only

average means; certainly not nobility. This is evidence that the local non-élite were vulnerable to outside forces.

As the seventeenth, and (particularly) eighteenth centuries progressed, various schemes were undertaken to improve the navigation of the Mersey, the Mersey and Irwell river improvements initially provided an outlet to open water, at Runcorn, for the burgeoning city of Manchester; the Bridgewater Canal improved this further; and the Sankey Canal, cutting through what is now Widnes, all increased traffic on the upper Mersey. This increase in traffic considerably advanced prospects for maritime trade and industrial growth in Runcorn (and a brief period as a health resort).

As the area began its ascent from decline and stagnation, towards full industrialisation, it will be interesting to attempt an assessment of the extent to which its relatively isolated setting had affected the lives of ‘ordinary people’ and, as the locality’s importance to the massively changing economic and social environment grew, how these changes impacted on their lives. In the following chapters, this dissertation will attempt to assess these changes in the lives of ‘ordinary people,’ and to examine aspects of their relationships with each other and the physical landscape through one of the few available documentary sources pertaining to them; their probate inventories.

		<u>£ - s - d</u>
Imp.	Beds Sheets and Blanketts att.	.05-00-00
It.	Bedstocks Tables Cupboards & Chests att.	.01-10-00
It.	Two Milke Kine att.	.05-00-00
It.	Two Calves att.	.01-13-04
It.	One Mare & Colt att.	.03-10-00
It.	Barley growing att.	.04-10-00
It.	Threshed Barley att.	.01-04-00
It.	Codware growing att.	.02-10-00
It.	Codware threshed att.	.00-03-00
It.	Husbandryware att.	.01-10-00
It.	Hemp growing and pilled att.	.01-00-00
It.	Seven young Sheep att.	.01-04-00
It.	One hand Milne att.	.00-13-04
It.	Brass and Pewter att.	.02-10-00
It.	Bacon att.	.00-13-04
It.	wool att.	.00-10-00
It.	Piggs geese & henns att.	.00-13-04
It.	Butter & Cheese att.	.00-13-04
It.	Iron ware att.	.00-06-08
It.	Coupery & Earthen ware att.	.01-00-00
It.	Wearing Apparrell att.	.02-10-00
It.	A Stone Trough att.	.00-05-00
It.	In Moneys.	.80-00-00
Somme is =		118-09-04

FIGURE 1. Probate inventory of Thomas Cooper, yeoman of Runcorn, died 1663, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1663.



FIGURE 2. Brookfield Farm, Higher Runcorn.



FIGURE 3. The Old Hall, Weston.

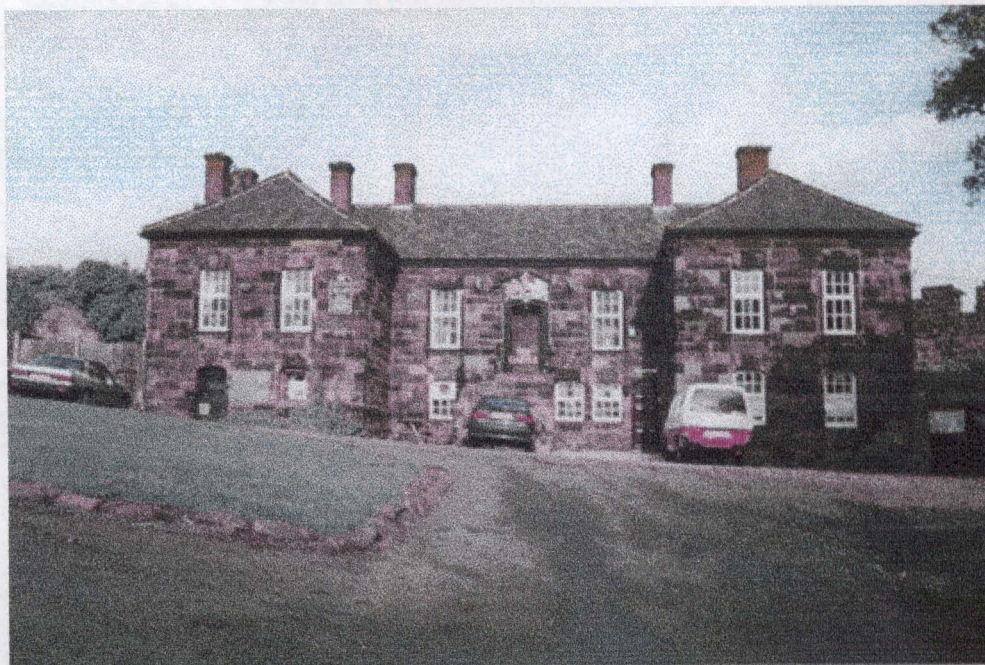


FIGURE 4. The Castle Hotel, Halton, formerly the Courthouse. It was built in 1737 to replace the fifteenth century gatehouse.



FIGURE 5. Castle Rock, Runcorn, in 1999, all physical evidence of the fortification has been destroyed.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ M. Reed, *The Landscape of Britain from the Beginnings to 1914* (London 1990), pp.275-6.

² M. Swanton (Trans. & Ed.), *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle* (Abingdon Manuscript); H.F. Starkey, *Old Runcorn* (Halton Borough Council publication, 1990), pp.4-5.

³ Starkey, *Old Runcorn*, pp.4-5.

⁴ Quoted in Ibid. p. 5.

⁵ L. Toulmin Smith (ed.) *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales, Volume 5* (London, 1964), p. 24; J.Chandler, (ed.) *John Leland's Itinerary, Travels in Tudor England* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 55-6.

⁶ Starkey, *Old Runcorn*, p. 173.

⁷ L. Toulmin Smith (ed.) *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales, Volume 5* (London, 1964), p. 41; John Leland in J.Chandler, (ed.) *John Leland's Itinerary, Travels in Tudor England* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 268-9.

⁸ D. King, *The Vale Royal of England, or The County Palatine of Chester* (1852 edition, republished Manchester, 1976)pp 96-8.

⁹ H.F. Starkey, *Old Runcorn*, pp. 57-9.

CHAPTER – 2

Earning a Living: agriculture and trade

One of the aims of this study is to ascertain the extent to which people retained an agricultural interest, during a period when both new and established industries and trading activities were expanding in the area, and to attempt to assess the level of farmers' involvement in industry, and other areas of commerce. Probate inventories of deceased with a declared occupation (such as yeoman, weaver, etc.), ought to provide useful information in these areas, as crops, livestock, tools and other equipment and machinery not connected to the declared occupation would suggest that other economic activities were being carried out.

Agriculture and trade

It was held in some quarters during this period, that men ought not to change their means of employment, as Daniel Defoe wrote in the early eighteenth century,

It is the judgement of some experienced tradesmen, that no man ought to go from one business to another, or launch out of the trade or employment he was bred to: *Tractent fabrilis fabri* – 'Every man to his own business;' and, they tell us, men never thrive when they do so.¹

Defoe remarks, however that he knew 'some good and encouraging examples of the contrary,'² and studies of probate inventories undertaken in various regions indicate a significant (if variable) diversification of individuals' sources of income. For instance, Thomas Cope, a miller of Allscott, Wrockwardine (Shropshire), who died in 1666, had listed in amongst his goods; four cows, one bull and three heifers; five horses and two colts; five swine; hay and poultry, as well as 'beef bacon and other household provision' (not normally listed, if for personal consumption). These goods comprised more three quarters of his entire estate.³ Similarly, the inventory of Shropshire collier, George

Hewlett (1725), shows that he owned an unspecified quantity of hay, a cow and a pig, valued together at £4-13s.⁴

A further example is that of Thomas Andrew, a Stockport woollen draper (1634). Amongst his goods and chattels are listed, one cow, one swine, oats and barley, hay, cheese and farming implements, giving a combined total of £14-13s.8d, almost a quarter of the total, if we do not count the goods in his shop, or the debts due to him.⁵

C.B. Phillips' work on the probate inventories of Kendal shoemakers shows that the value of agricultural goods and effects made up a significant proportion of cordwainers' wealth in the town during the seventeenth century. From 1580 to 1650, the value (expressed as a median) of agricultural goods made up 8.4% of total wealth, against 47.3% for trade goods, and from 1660 to 1700 12.4%, against 28.85% for trade goods.⁶ Whilst these figures cannot represent reliable conclusions as to the exact extent of cordwainers' agricultural involvement, Phillips' work shows that agriculture and other trades, (keeping a tavern, for instance) commonly provided an often substantial supplement to their income, and occasionally the most part of it.⁷

Similarly, we can see from D. Riley's work on probate inventories in Lancashire that both crops and livestock were commonly found in the effects of deceased from all strata of society.⁸ All 21 of the inventories from the trades/professions examined listed, and valued, crops and animals, although Riley makes no distinction between those animals used for transport and those for agricultural purposes. As with the Kendal shoemakers, the sample is too small for statistical analysis to promise much more than a scant overview. However, what Riley's, and Phillips' figures, and the work of Cox and Trinder show, is that trades people were significantly involved in agriculture.

From the above, it is apparent that there was a tendency for people to derive their income from diverse sources during this period, and it comes as no surprise that the inventories included in this study display similar trends. For example, when Thomas Ackerley of Runcorn made his last will he described himself as a carpenter, and we may assume that he earned a significant proportion of his income in this way. However, if we examine the contents of his probate inventory, we can see that as well as the tools and products of his trade, he owned livestock to the value of £2-10s., and crops worth £1-10s. (figure 6).

Additionally, we see that, he had cheese, meal (edible grain or pulses, ground to a powder) and grouts (small beer) to the value of £1-8s. Whilst it was common for all but the very poor (who could not afford either the ingredients or fuel required) to carry out brewing at home,⁹ as stated above, it was not usual for appraisers to include food intended for family or personal consumption in probate inventories. Perhaps we may infer, therefore, that as the appraisers included these disparate, processed agricultural products in the inventory, (and lumped them all together as one item) they were intended for sale. Whether this is actually the case, or not, it is clear from his probate inventory that Thomas Ackerley retained a significant interest in agriculture.

The probate inventory of another carpenter, Thomas Runcorn of Runcorn (died 1677, see figure 15, Ch 3) also reveals an agricultural interest. The inventory lists hay valued at 6s.8d, the same as that of his tools, and higher than his probable stock-in-trade (the inventory does not specify whether the wooden items valued at 5s.2d were his stock-in-trade, or his own personal effects).

	<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>
Imp. For brass and pewter.	.	.	.02-10-00
In beds boulsters pillows and all other furniture thereto belonging.	.	.	.05-00-00
It. In linen and napperyware.	.	.	.03-06-00
It. In warps toe and cushins.	.	.	.00-08-00
It. In treenware cowperware presses and stocks and all other like.	.	.	.00-19-06
It. In grates tongs tooles and other ironware.	.	.	.00-10-00
It. For tables chests boxes bedstocks boards and other od timber.	.	.	.01-15-00
It. One mare and coult and two swine.	.	.	.02-10-00
It. In cheese meale and grouts.	.	.	.01-08-00
It. In mugs and coles.	.	.	.00-10-00
It. In corne on the ground.	.	.	.01-10-00
It. In books.	.	.	.00-13-00
It. In wearing apparrell.	.	.	.01-00-00
			Total 22-19-06

FIGURE 6. Probate inventory of Thomas Ackerley, carpenter, of Runcorn, died 1673. (CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1673).

	<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>
Imp. pewter.	.	.	.00-10-00
3 skellets 4s. 3 boxes 2s.-6d.	.	.	.00-06-06
a pair of Bedstocks and Bedding.	.	.	.00-06-08
a table 4s. 3 stools 1s.	.	.	.00-05-00
2 Back stools 2s. 3 spilled chairs 1s.-6d.	.	.	.00-03-06
a Grate, a pair of tongs and a crow.	.	.	.00-02-06
a fire shovel and toasting iron.	.	.	.00-01-00
a smoothing iron 1s.-6d a frying pann 6d..	.	.	.00-02-00
a Dozen and ½ of trenchers.	.	.	.00-02-00
3 Spinning wheels.	.	.	.00-05-00
a looking Glass..	.	.	.00-00-06
money in Thomas Ellison's hands.	.	.	.10-10-10
			Total. 12-14-08

FIGURE 7. Probate inventory of William Helsby, blacksmith, of Weston, died 1731. (CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1731).

This trend can be seen to continue into the eighteenth century, as evinced by the 1716 inventory of Samuel Burch, a weaver of Runcorn. This altogether more substantial inventory, totalling £38-2s., shows that Burch earned a part of living from agricultural pursuits. In amongst his household effects, tools and stock, we can see that he owned cattle to the value of £10; pigs worth £1; bacon valued at £1-10s.; and hay and corn worth £1-10s. and 15s. respectively, in addition to his own barn and corn store. By adding these totals (£38-15s.) we can see that agricultural stock and produce account for over half the value of Samuel Burch's estate. Further evidence of tradesmen in the Runcorn area retaining an agricultural interest can be found in, amongst others, the probate inventory of Thomas Carter, a shoemaker of Halton (figure 17, Ch 3). Even if we consider the 'wooden ware' and 'iron ware' to consist entirely of his work tools, then Carter's crops and livestock are worth more than twice the tools of his trade. This trend was not entirely all encompassing, however. We can see from the probate inventory of William Helsby, a blacksmith, of Weston (1731), that no agricultural effects were appraised as part of his estate (figure 7).

Yeomen: commerce, trade and diversification

From the above it is clear that agriculture was an important source of income for the tradesmen of the Runcorn area during this period, and that this was not an unusual state of affairs, if we consider work carried out on the probate inventories of other areas. However, given that the Runcorn area was about to become heavily industrialised, and that coastal and overseas trade were slowly increasing (and about to boom towards the end of the eighteenth century) following improvements of river facilities in the town,¹⁰ is there any evidence that the locality's farmers were taking advantage of new opportunities

and diversifying into other economic areas, and do their activities contrast to those in other regions?

There are three surviving, seventeenth century probate inventories from the Grice family, which, although we have no way of knowing their exact relationship, seem a good point from which to begin addressing this question. If we examine the inventory of ferryman, Thomas Grice (1636), it would appear to follow the trend of a tradesman supplementing his income via agriculture. However, the Grices were farmers, who continued farming on the edge of urban Runcorn (at Halton Lodge) until the late 1960s, when the area was developed for new housing. Could this be an example of a yeoman family branching out into other areas?

In 1640, Richard Ryder, another Runcorn man died leaving an estate valued at £128-11s.8d. There is no mention in his will or probate inventory of Ryder's occupation, although an agricultural occupation is hinted at by the entry of swine valued at £4-10s., along with apples and other produce. However, over half of the value of this estate (£69) was accounted for by the value of one half share in 'Ye fferry boate with halfe of ye geere & stuff thereto belonging.'¹¹

Until the dissolution, the ferry at Runcorn had been administered by the canons of Norton Priory, who had been entitled to 10% of the profits.¹² Although the site was now owned by the Brooke family, who had bought it from the Crown (and occupied a mansion house there until the 1920s) the Priory's connection with the ferry seems to have continued into the middle of the seventeenth century, as Ryder's inventory had the following entry, 'Two tables one dishborde 3 payre of Bedstocks one chest and formes beeing in Norton House.'¹³

With trade increasing during the seventeenth century, following a period of decline and stagnation, the operation of the ferry would have become more lucrative and presented an opportunity for economic diversity. The high value of the ferry (£138, calculated by doubling Richard Ryder's half share) seems to confirm this. Additionally, Thomas Grice's inventory shows that his estate was valued at £63-18s.8d, including £45-16s.8d in debts owed to him. Whilst this sum seems fairly small, when compared to that of the other Thomas Grice (1670), whose estate was valued at £193, it compares favourably with that of Richard Grice (1629), whose estate totalled just over £34. We should, of course be very careful in drawing conclusions as to the comparative wealth of people from their probate inventories, but the evidence suggests that Thomas Grice (1636) made a reasonable living from the ferry, supplemented as it was by a little agricultural activity. However, apart from some brewing equipment, which was common in the homes of all who could afford the ingredients and fuel (see above), it seems that the Grice yeomen were almost entirely occupied with agriculture.

Whilst the Grice yeomen seem to have derived their income from their agricultural pursuits, this is not the case with their contemporary, Thomas Tarbock (yeoman of Runcorn, 1647). Tarbock's inventory provides evidence that a proportion of his (or his family's) income was derived from textile working, with flax and yarn listed at a total value of £5. The inventories of yeomen, William Norman (Weston, 1636), John Birkenhead (Weston, 1670), Thomas Parker (Runcorn, 1722) Samuel Runcorn (Runcorn, 1741) and John Smith (Runcorn, 1766) all indicate that some spinning was carried out within their households. However, these appear to be exceptions, rather than the rule.

Only six out of a total of twenty five yeomens' inventories show evidence of spinning, or other textile activities (although flax and hemp were common crops in the area).

The probate inventory of Thomas Latham of Halton (1699) suggests a degree of diversification into other areas. His inventory contains the following two items:

all his Thatshing tooles.	.	.	1s.-06d
all his other working tooles.	.	.	3s. ¹⁴

Although Thomas Latham described himself as a yeoman in his will, the appraisers of his probate inventory defined his occupation as 'labourer.' Perhaps he had a grander idea of his station than did his neighbours. If his neighbours' definition of his occupation was correct (unfortunately, the contents of his will and probate inventory are a little ambiguous in this respect), then Thomas Latham was not so much a yeoman branching out into other areas of economic activity, as an artisan with significant agricultural interests.

Another example, at the end of our period might be that of John Smith (1766). In his will, Smith declares himself to be a yeoman, yet the appraisers of his probate inventory describe him as an innkeeper. The contents listed in his probate inventory seems to indicate that John Smith was indeed an innkeeper without any agricultural interests, except for the almost ubiquitous pig, kept in a cellar. As trade increased in the Runcorn area, perhaps he moved out of farming altogether to concentrate on a more profitable enterprise, retaining for his own purposes, the designation of yeoman, as that was his initial station.

The above instances notwithstanding, surviving probate inventories seem to suggest that although a number of individuals, and families, diversified to some degree,

yeomen in the area did not venture into other areas of economic activity to the same extent as tradesmen involved themselves with agriculture.

It can be seen that instances of tradesmen in Runcorn earning a proportion of their income from agriculture matches the national picture (so far as that may be ascertained), but does the local yeomanry's level of alternative economic activity similarly compare to that of other areas? In order to answer this question we must examine work carried out in other areas. Peter Brears' work in Yorkshire reveals that over a third of surviving inventories mention yarn or other textile working equipment and that, by and large, the tendency in that county was for minor yeomen and cottagers to spin yarn, while the more prosperous yeomen and gentlemen wove and finished it, although spinning and weaving equipment could be found together in the same inventory (as in the case of Henry Robinson (Gentleman of Swinsty, who died in 1639)).¹⁵

We can see a similar picture in Shropshire, with yeomen's probate inventories being largely confined to household objects, and farming equipment and produce. As in Yorkshire and Cheshire, textile production work seems to be the major exception. This is shown by, amongst others, the inventories of William Bill of Donnington (1686), who owned a loom and other weaving equipment valued at £1-10s. as well as hemp and flax worth 10s.,¹⁶ and Thomas Latham of Wrockwardine (1698), who had hemp, flax and yarn to the value of 10s.¹⁷

As one may expect, Francis Steer's work on surviving mid-Essex probate inventories shows a different picture. The accuracy of any conclusions drawn from Essex probate inventories is tempered by the fact that most inventories from the county have disappeared.¹⁸ However, Steer's sample of inventories from farms and cottages seems

large enough to validate his conclusions. Almost all the yeomen's inventories reveal a lack of any economic activity other than farming (with the possible exception of the ubiquitous brewing). Perhaps appraisers in this area followed a different protocol, and textile equipment found itself listed in with other items, as is perhaps the case with Samuel Hanbery, a yeoman of Writtle (1657).¹⁹ In this probate inventory, wool is listed along with cheeses, two tables, one half hundred weight, hops and scales (total value £9-1s.), as the contents of the garret. It may be that Mid-Essex yeomen were involved to the same extent in textile work as their northern counterparts, but the evidence from probate inventories does not necessarily show this, and it would perhaps be safer to conclude that their land usually provided their sole means of income. During this period, the Essex weaving industry was still important, and as Steer argues, we should not be surprised to find home-weaving in the county a less common activity than in others.²⁰

During this period, yeomen in the Runcorn area seem to have differed little from the majority of their counterparts in the other regions cited here, with regard to their economic diversity. Their probate inventories suggest that for the most part, their income was almost entirely derived from agricultural activities. Where they did branch out, textiles was the mostly favoured industry.

The above evidence seems to indicate differences in scale of involvement in textiles; a third of Yorkshire inventories list textiles or relevant working implements, whereas the proportion in Shropshire is smaller, and in mid-Essex, almost insignificant. This should not necessarily lead us to conclude that there is no valid comparison to be made in this instance between inventories from the Runcorn area and those from elsewhere; it is not the purpose of this study merely to count and then compare figures;

due to differing appraisal methods, and the unpredictable survival rate of probate inventories, any results from such an exercise will inevitably be flawed. Evidence from surviving probate inventories seems to indicate that the yeomanry of the Runcorn area, during this period, in common with that of Yorkshire, Essex and Shropshire derived almost all its income from agriculture. Where they did diversify, the cases of Thomas Grice, the ferryman, John Smith, the innkeeper and, possibly, Thomas Latham notwithstanding, it was almost invariably into textiles.

From the above, it can be seen that, even though the national, regional and local economies were changing, and moving towards urbanisation and industrialisation,²¹ artisans in the Runcorn area (regardless of their specific trade) retained significant agricultural interests. We can also see that the local yeomen largely refrained from branching out into industries or trade other than farming, with a small but significant number being involved to some extent in textiles. Both these trends seem to reflect the national picture. Runcorn's position as a small out-of-the-way settlement in a North Cheshire *cul-de-sac*, undergoing the first stages of growth in trade, industry and importance, seems to have little, or no bearing on its inhabitants' established economic activity.

Notes to Chapter 2

- ¹ D. Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1839 edition, republished Gloucester, 1987), p. 29.
- ² Ibid. p. 29.
- ³ B. Trinder, & J. Cox (eds.), *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* (London, 1980), p. 403.
- ⁴ Ibid. p.179.
- ⁵ C.B. Phillips, and J.H. Smith (eds.), *Stockport Probate Records 1590-1619, The Record Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, Vol 124, 1985, pp. 204-7.
- ⁶ C.B. Phillips, 'Probate Records and the Kendal Shoemakers in the Seventeenth Century' in Riden, P. (ed.) *Probate Records and the Local Community* (Gloucester, 1975), p. 39.
- ⁷ Ibid. pp. 35-40.
- ⁸ D. Riley, 'Wealth and Social Structure in North-Western Lancashire in the Later Seventeenth Century: A New Use for Probate Inventories' in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* Vol.144, 1995, pp. 89-90.
- ⁹ B. Trinder, & J. Cox (eds.), *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* (London, 1980), p. xv.
- ¹⁰ H.F. Starkey, *Runcorn in Times Past* (Chorley, 1980), pp. 3-4.
- ¹¹ Probate inventory of Richard Ryder CCC ALS WS 1640.
- ¹² H.F. Starkey, *Old Runcorn* (Halton Borough Council publication, 1990), p. 35.
- ¹³ Probate inventory of Richard Ryder. C.C.R.O. WS 1641
- ¹⁴ Probate inventory of Thomas Latham C.C.R.O. WI 1699.
- ¹⁵ P.C.D. Brears, (ed.) *Yorkshire Probate Inventories 1542-1689* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1972), pp. xii & 86-92.
- ¹⁶ B. Trinder, & J. Cox, (eds.) *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* pp. 213-4.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 421-2
- ¹⁸ A Macfarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 73.
- ¹⁹ F.W. Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex 1635-1749* (London, 1969), p. 106.
- ²⁰ Ibid. p.31
- ²¹ A. Crosby, *A History of Cheshire* (Chichester, 1996), p. 58; P. Griffiths, A. Fox, & S.Hindle, (Eds.) *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), p. 4.

CHAPTER – 3

Exceptional inventories: widows, debt and the poor

Following the lead of John Moore, who cites the value of the ‘exceptional detail, or oddity,’¹ this chapter will examine the seemingly disparate issues of debt, women’s probate inventories, and those of the very poor. As with other areas of this study, statistics will play a very small part in the analysis. Instead, these exceptional inventories will be examined individually, in order to extract useful information from them.

There is very little documentary evidence concerning the lives of the poorest members of society during this period. Therefore, attention will be paid to the inventories of the smaller estates included in this study, especially those valued at, or under £5, as these did not legally require probate inventories to be made. Though they may seem scant appraisals of desultory collections of goods, these probate inventories nevertheless represent a rare chance to take a glimpse at the lives of the very poor during this period.

The lives of non-élite women during this period are also poorly documented; women’s probate inventories are uncommon; only being required in the cases of widows. Existing widows’ probate inventories, therefore represent one of the best sources of evidence of women’s rôles and activities.

Issues of debt and investment

In an inventory of goods and chattels, mention may, or may not be, made of money owed to, and by, the deceased. Unfortunately, the appraisers in the Runcorn area did not follow a single protocol for recording these figures (indeed, it is possible that they did not have complete knowledge of moneys owing to, and owed by, the deceased).

It seems in the light of this, that a statistical analysis of the figures would be unlikely to provide satisfactory and credible conclusions. Additionally, it is possible that debts arising from usury during the 1620s may have been deliberately kept secret, as the Crown was liable to take money in the form of forced (interest free) loans, and heavy taxes from usurers, and Deputy Lieutenants in Cheshire were ‘careful to inform themselves of moneyed men’ involved in usury.² However, in attempting to find evidence concerning widows (who commonly earned a part of their income from loaning money at interest, during this period), and the very poor (to whom an unpaid debt of a seemingly insignificant sum could mean extreme hardship), attention must be paid to the issue of debt, when it is included in the probate inventories.

Given the above, it seems sensible to cover those issues of debt particularly pertinent to the inventories of widows, and the very poor, under separate sub-headings within this chapter. This section will instead examine debts, where they are mentioned, in the remaining inventories from the sample.

Although it is not the intention of this study to provide detailed statistical analyses, it might nevertheless be interesting to see what proportion of individuals’ estate at death, was comprised of money owed to them. There are thirty three surviving inventories pertinent to this section, where debts owed to the deceased are listed, or mentioned (see figure 8). From these we can see that there is no direct correlation between the value of the estate and the proportion of it made up by debts owed to the deceased.

Probate inventories which name debtors (or creditors) ought to prove revealing. Such inventories have the potential to provide a snapshot of interpersonal relationships,

Figure 8. Probate inventories which list debts.

C.C.R.O. call no. and year	Name	Occupation or station	Township	Value of bonds or debts owed £-s.-d	Value of estate £-s.-d
WS 1607	Edward Birkenhead	unknown	Halton	£56-10s.10d	£58-5s.8d
WS 1609	[?] Fletcher	unknown	Runcorn	£19	£39-0s.-6d
WS 1618	Hugh Houghton	husbandman	Halton	£18	£59-2s.
WS 1623	Richard Lydiate	wheelwright	Weston	£35-11s.	£100-1s.4d
WS 1625	Edward Kendrick	clerk	Runcorn	9s.	£16-3s.8d
WS 1630	Robert Houghland	unknown	Weston	5s.6d	£39-7s.-10d
WS 1633	Richard Breck	husbandman	Runcorn	£220	£295-7s.-3d
WS 1636	Thomas Grice	ferryman	Runcorn	£45-16s.-8d	£63-18s.-8d
WS 1636	William Norman	yeoman	Weston	£65-7s.9d	£182-1s.1d
WS 1640	Joan Smith	widow	Runcorn	£58-15s.	£65-0s.6d
WS 1642	John Runcorn	yeoman	Runcorn	£13-10s.4d	£97-7s.2d
WS 1647	Robert Coblall	husbandman	Runcorn	£57-6s.	£112-3s.8d
WS 1647	Thomas Tarbock	yeoman	Runcorn	£12	£99-15s.
WI 1661	Thomas Burtonwood	shoemaker	Weston	£13-16s.-10d	£14-9s.-10
WS 1663	Ellen Tarbock	widow	Runcorn	£6-10s.	£155-6s.
WS 1669	Richard Acton	yeoman	Halton	£7-7s.	£28-4s.8d
WS1670	Thomas Grice	yeoman	Runcorn	£90	£193
WS 1672	Thomas Leathwood	cooper	Halton	£1-10s. (including ready money)	£17-5s.3d

C.C.R.O. call no. and year	Name	Occupation or station	Township	Value of bonds or debts owed £-s.-d	Value of estate £-s.-d
WS 1677	Thomas Runcorn	carpenter	Runcorn	12s.-4d	£2-9s.2d
WS 1684	William Clotton	husbandman	Halton	£2-10s.	£26-3s.4d
WS 1685	William Banne	unknown	Halton	£96-10 (in bond & ready money)	£104-10s.-4d
WS 1687	Thomas Breck	unknown	Runcorn	£38	£125-0s.-4d
WS 1690	Samuel Muskett	yeoman	Higher Runcorn	£100	£227-5s.
WS 1705	William Whitely	husbandman	Halton	£5-10s.	£38-14s.-2d
WS 1709	Samuel Coppucks	yeoman	Halton	£50 (in bonds good & bad)	£215-15s.4d
WS 1712	John Jackson	yeoman	Halton	£30 (debts sperate and desperate)	£84-15s.
WS 1720	William Kirkman	clerk	Halton	£304	£570-12s.
WS 1721	John Chow	yeoman	Halton	£251-5s.(including ready money & desperate debts	£353-4s.
WS 1723	Charles Lightfoot	unknown	Halton	£8	£16-8s.6d
WS 1730	Thomas Cawley	yeoman	Halton	£7 (timber and some small debts)	£173-6s.6d
WI 1731	William Helsby	blacksmith	Weston	£10-10s.	£12-14s.-8d
WI 1752	Job Hurstfield	miller	Halton	£2-10s. (money and debt)	£15-17s.11d
WS 1761	Robert Lydiate	yeoman	Halton	£901-7s.	£956-3s.7d

especially when the probate inventories of named debtors also survive. The will and probate inventory of Richard Acton, a yeoman of Halton (1669) is a good example, as it not only names his debtors, but we also know some of the goods and services he provided for them. When Richard Acton made his last will on 5 October 1669, he wrote the following on the reverse side of the document:

Debts owing to mee by	L – s – d
John Yates - - - -	0 – 12 – 0
And for meadowing - - -	1 – 10 – 0
For Barly ten measures at - -	0 - 2 – 3 A measure
By William Yates 6 measures	
Of Barly at the same rate	
By Robert Profit - - -	0 – 19 – 0
By Master Leech - - -	1 – 9 – 0
By Patrick Clinton - - -	0 – 2 – 0 ³

When the estate was appraised on 3 November 1669 (see figure 9), these debts were still unpaid (hardly surprising since the two documents were written within a month of each other). Unfortunately we have no way of knowing how long these debts were outstanding, but we may safely conclude that the deceased had not written them off, and considered them an important part of his estate, as indeed he might, since they constituted over 25% of its total worth.

Interestingly, the probate inventory of Thomas Jackson, a tailor of Halton (who also died in 1669), lists moneys paid out (apparently before the estate was appraised), with the recipients’ names and the service provided. The second item on this list shows a sum of 10s. paid for meadowing to John Acton, the legitimate son (and heir) of Richard (Richard Acton did acknowledge one bastard son, also called Richard).⁴

The will and probate inventory of Thomas Grice, a ferry man of Runcorn (1636), also contains a list of debtors and the sums owed, which amounted to £45-16s.-8d, almost

	<u>£ - s - d</u>
Inprimis One cow.	03-00-00
Itm. Two swine.	00-16-00
Itm in corne threshed and unthreshed.	08-10-00
Itm for hay.	01-00-00
Itm for bedstidds and beddinge.	03-00-00
Itm in winnows as sheets napkins & pillowboards.	01-00-00
Itm in brasse and pewter.	01-10-00
Itm three tables and trestles and formes to them belonging and One cupboard.	01-00-00
Itm in chaires & stooles and a spinninge wheele.	00-02-06
Itm in treene ware and earthen ware.	00-05-00
Itm in iron ware.	00-04-00
Itm in fewell as coales and turfe and other wood Lying in the fould.. . . .	00-10-00
Itm in debts owing from John Yates.	03-04-06
Itm from William Yates.	00-13-06
Itm from Rob ^t Proffitt.	00-19-00
Itm from M ^R Leech.	01-09-00
Itm from Patricke Clinton.	00-02-00
Itm in apparrell.	01-00-00
Total	28-04-06

**FIGURE 9. The probate inventory of Richard Acton, yeoman of Halton, died 1669,
CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1669.**

75% of the total estate (see figure 8). However, we should not conclude that the names of debtors appear on the probate inventory only where the amount owed to the deceased accounts for a significant proportion of the estate. The inventory of John Runcorn, a yeoman of Runcorn (1642) lists debts owed to him amounting to £1-10s.-4d, out of a total of £84-17s.-02d. Four debtors are listed on this inventory; Thomas Martin and Joan Muskett (a widow), who owed 9s. and 1s.4d respectively, and £4 and £1 respectively in 'lent money' to Marge Alcote and Hugh Birch. The inventory of Richard Ryder (1641), of Runcorn names a solitary debtor, a Mr. Thomas Savage, who owed him £1, out of an estate valued in total at £128-11s.-8d.

As stated in Chapter 2, Richard Ryder's probate inventory contains an entry which hints at another aspect of life during our period; that of investment, he owned one half share in the ferry boat and equipment, worth £69. Additionally, Ryder, in common with some of his contemporaries (both locally and in other areas) held money in bonds (£20). Unfortunately the probate inventories from the Runcorn area, in common with those studied from Stockport,⁵ Mid-Essex,⁶ Shropshire⁷ and Yorkshire,⁸ provide scant, if any, detail of the nature of bonds, or whether they amounted to an investment, or merely the guarantee of a loan. Similarly, there is rarely any evidence as to the nature of the projects in which the deceased may have invested. However, it seems that those with enough funds were able to increase their wealth by investing in a number of schemes and projects, or as Daniel Defoe (writing towards the end of our period) argued, were vulnerable to projectors, 'who are ... as birds of prey ... among innocent fowls.'⁹

There is no firm evidence from surviving probate inventories as to the levels of success of these various investments, but nevertheless, it may be revealing to discover

who held bonds, and to what value. The probate inventory William Banne of Halton (1685) has 'bond and ready money' entered at a value of £96-10s., but unfortunately does not reveal their relative values. However, if we subtract this value from that of his total estate (£104-10s.4d), we arrive at a sum of £8-00s.4d. Given that his inventory makes no mention of any tools for work, and the only crop listed is corn to the value of 13s.4d, we may perhaps be safe in concluding that William Banne's bonds provided a significant proportion of his income.

The probate inventory of Samuel Muskett, a yeoman of Higher Runcorn (1690), values his estate at £227-5s., including over £100 for his crops and livestock and £100 exactly for 'moneys upon bonds.' Muskett, it seems was a wealthy man, although his household effects and clothing amounted to only £15-7s. From this information, we have no way of deducing the success or otherwise of his investments. However, it appears that the Muskett family were later to fall upon hard times. This is borne out by the inventory of his relative (probably his son), John Muskett (1720), who was also one of the appraisers of Samuel Muskett's estate (see FIGURES 10 & 11). Whilst we cannot with any degree of certainty deduce that the Muskett family's decline was in any part due to bad investments, given Defoe's misgivings, and a national economic background of cyclical recession and recovery,¹⁰ it remains a possibility.

Amongst the surviving probate inventories from the Runcorn area, bonds and investments are not commonly listed, and there are certainly too few for credible conclusions as to investors' and bond holders' success to be drawn. However, if we consider the evidence alongside that from probate inventories published and studied

	<u>£ - s - d</u>
Imprimis in Corne and Hey. . .	40-00-00
Itm in one Marle-cart and a barrow. .	00-14-00
Itm in two bedsteads and a chest and a cupbord and a table. . .	02-07-00
Itm in Brasse and pewter. . .	04-00-00
Itm in bedding. . .	04-00-00
Itm in carts and wheels and plowes Harrows.	03-00-00
Itm in tresses and all other Husbandry ware.	01-10-00
Itm in two colts and three calves. .	05-00-00
Itm in seventeen cows and four Young beasts.	40-00-00
Itm in three mares and two geldings. .	20-00-00
Itm in two swine.	01-14-00
Itm in moneys upon bonds. . .	100-00-00
Itm in his wearing apparell. . .	05-00-00
	227-5-00

**FIGURE 10. Probate inventory of Samuel Muskett,
yeoman of Higher Runcorn, died 1690. (CHESHIRE
COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1690).**

	<u>£ - s - d</u>
Imprimis Cattel.	15-00-00
Itm Corn upon ye ground. . .	08-00-00
Itm Carts and plougs and Husbandryware.	03-00-00
Itm Bedstocks and beding. . .	04-00-00
Itm Brass and Pewter.	01-05-00
Itm Tables and cupboards. . .	00-18-00
Itm Chairs and stools.	00-10-00
Itm Treen ware.	00-10-00
Itm wearing apparel.	01-00-00
Itm Corn and Hay.	01-00-00
Itm All sorts of lumber.	02-00-00
	Totum 39-03-00

**FIGURE 11. Probate inventory of John Muskett,
yeoman of Higher Runcorn, died 1720. (CHESHIRE
COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1720)**

elsewhere, we can see certain similarities in the scale of the bonds held and in the type of people holding them, perhaps suggesting once again that the Runcorn area was not so isolated in the years leading up to the Industrial Revolution, as was previously thought. If large sums were being invested by some of the area's inhabitants, and these sums in the main correspond with those invested in other areas, by largely similar types of people (including substantial yeomen and the more affluent tradespeople), then it may seem reasonable to assume that there was a significant level of contact between this area and other parts of the county, and country.

Widows' probate inventories

Amongst the exceptional inventories included in this study are those of widows. Their probate inventories are a rare and valuable documentary source for the activities of women during a period of fluctuating economic stability, and can provide clues as to their means of income, their general standard of living, and, occasionally, their relationships with other members of the community.

Bernard Capp argues that, due to the increasing power of trade guilds, during the early part of our period, and then their declining influence towards the end of the seventeenth century, non élite women's prospects for employment, were slowly being increased.¹¹ Alice Clark argues that women's economic position seriously declined after about 1660,¹² and Olwen Hufton, that it was 'impossible for a widow to be richer by the death of her husband than she was during his lifetime.'¹³ It would be interesting to discover whether evidence to support any of these views can be found in the Runcorn area, from local widow's probate inventories.

The probate inventories of Thomas Leathwood (1728) and widow, Elizabeth (1741) make an interesting comparison (figures 12 & 13). Elizabeth Leathwood's probate inventory values her estate at £3-3s.-4d less than her husband's had valued his, thirteen years earlier. It is possible that Thomas Leathwood's debts and funeral expenses could account for a part of this sum, as his will directs that these be paid out of his estate,¹⁴ but the figures suggest that Elizabeth Leathwood was (as Hufton would argue) poorer as a widow, than when her husband was alive (not that she was particularly wealthy then), but to what extent, and in what way?

There is more to these inventories than a simple comparison of their relative totals could show. In two respects, Thomas Leathwood's inventory is more detailed than that of his widow. Firstly, in his, the items are appraised room by room (with three rooms being named); secondly, the items themselves are more thoroughly described, than in Elizabeth's. Even given this disparity in detail, it is possible to match items from one inventory with the other, and comparing their values could perhaps reveal how the value of the Leathwood's estate had diminished. The first item appraised in Elizabeth Leathwood's probate inventory is 'one bed with its furniture,' valued at £1-10s., this would seem to match with Thomas' 'one small fither bed and boulster two blankitts one rugg one pair of bedstocks,' also valued at £1-10s., revealing no loss of value.

However, the first item on Thomas' probate inventory, 'In ye house one clock,' valued at £1-5s., is listed as 'an old clock' on his widows inventory, and is only valued at 10s, losing over half its value. We have no way of knowing how this clock's condition

	<u>£ - s - d</u>
In ye house one clock..	.01-05-00
A grate and what belongs to it.	.00-04-00
Seven chairs and Eight Stools.	.00-06-08
two shilves and one dresser.	.00-03-06
four little dishes three porringers 4 plates.	.00-06-00
one pair of bellows two little skellits one kettle one back spittle one chafing dish one smoothing iron and heaters.	.01-02-06
In ye parlour one bed one pair of Bedstocks with furniture thereto belonging.	.01-00-00
one coffer and warming pan two little boxes.	.00-04-00
one small fither bed and boulster two blankitts one rugg one pair of bedstocks.	.01-10-00
In ye Buttery five shilves with some small necessaries[?].	.00-06-00
In ye Kitchen in treneware.	.00-10-00
Earthenware.	.00-02-00
Two Cows one horse saddle & bridle and wearing apparrell.	.14-05-06
	Total 21-06-08

FIGURE 12. The probate inventory of Thomas Leathwood, shoemaker, of Halton, died 1728, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1729).

	<u>£ - s - d</u>
Imprimis one bed with its Furniture.	.01-10-00
one chest.	.00-10-00
Two tables.	.00-06-00
one sitting wheel.	.00-03-00
three spill chairs.	.00-00-08
four stools.	.00-00-04
a house grate.	.00-00-08
an old clock.	.00-10-00
a cupboard.	.00-01-06
two coffers.	.00-01-00
two tenements worth about.	.15-00-00
	18-03-04

FIGURE 13. The probate inventory of Elizabeth Leathwood, widow, of Halton, died 1741, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1741).

may have deteriorated in the interim thirteen years, but the appraisers of Elizabeth's inventory described it as old, rather than broken, or in poor condition. Perhaps, then, the appraisers' use of the word 'old' denotes old fashioned, as, since the Restoration, the production of weight and spring clocks had rapidly increased in England, and Dutch long-case, pendulum clocks were being imported, both gaining popularity at the expense of the traditional lantern clock.¹⁵ If this were the case, then the loss of 15s. from the value of Elizabeth Leathwood's estate can not be ascribed to her widowhood, but rather to her clock being old fashioned and out of date.

The third item which seems to occur on both inventories is a grate, listed with items 'in ye house' in Thomas' inventory as 'A grate and what belongs to it' with a value of 4s., and as 'a house grate' valued at a mere 8d in his widow's. It seems incredible that a utilitarian item such as this could lose 90% of its value over thirteen years, but we are given a clue in the appraisers' descriptions of it. In Elizabeth's probate inventory the words 'and what belongs to it' are not used. This suggests that in 1728, the house grate was appraised complete with accessories, but as a single item in 1741. Perhaps Elizabeth had to sell the accessories, or they were lost or broken, and she could not afford to replace them. This would suggest that, in widowhood, Elizabeth Leathwood was indeed poorer than when husband was alive.

There are other revealing comparisons to be made between these inventories. We can see that Thomas Leathwood died, owning seven chairs and eight stools valued together at 6s.8d, whilst at her death, his widow owned three spill chairs (8d), and four stools (4d), giving a total value of 1s., and a loss in value of 5s.-8d. This is further

evidence of her diminished wealth in widowhood, not only in terms of the monetary value of her estate, but tangibly, in the loss of four chairs and three stools.

Other items on the two inventories hint at Elizabeth's less wealthy existence as a widow. There are more beds and bedding in Thomas' probate inventory than in Elizabeth's. Although neither inventory lists ready money, Thomas' lists two cows and a horse with saddle and bridle, along with his clothes, none of these items occur on Elizabeth's inventory. At his death, Thomas Leathwood owned a considerable (if not extensive) collection of household utensils, his widow, seems to have owned none. Added to this, we can see that Elizabeth owned a sitting wheel, and we may assume she used it to provide, or at least supplement, her income. The lack of such an item in her husband's probate inventory suggests that she had to take work in after his death, whereas, previously, there had been no need.

The relative wealth of Thomas Leathwood and his widow are brought into sharper focus, if we consider the last item on Elizabeth's probate inventory, 'two tenements worth about £15.' These tenements (cottages with a small parcel of land, entitled 'whitleys' and 'Leathwoods') were left to Elizabeth 'during her life' in Thomas' will, provided she did not remarry,¹⁶ but his probate inventory contains no mention of them, and they were not appraised as part of his estate. Their inclusion in Elizabeth's probate inventory is a little misleading, they were only left to her for own lifetime, and upon her death were to be passed to Thomas' nephews, John and Samuel Leathwood, who were to receive them if Elizabeth remarried, at an annual sum payable to her of 35s. (from John for Whitleys), and 45s. (from Samuel for Leathwoods).¹⁷ If we subtract the value of these tenements from the total of Elizabeth's estate, we are left with £3-3s.-4d.

It is possible to conclude from the above, that, following her husband's death, Elizabeth Leathwood lost the income from his trade as a shoemaker, widows were rarely allowed to take over their husband's business, regardless of whether, or not, they possessed the requisite skills.¹⁸ She then had to sell all but the most essential household items left by her husband, and having also sold, or otherwise lost, the horse and cows, scraped a living from the rents of the two small tenements, bequeathed to her by her husband (possibly £4 per year), together with whatever she could earn at her wheel.

The problems faced by Elizabeth Leathwood would have been common to many widows during this period. One possible solution to the problem of securing an income, other than remarriage (which might not necessarily be a guarantee or even an option,), would be for widows to employ what wealth was left to them in usury. Is there any evidence in their probate inventories, of widows lending money for profit, and what was the nature of other debts owed to, and by, widows in the Runcorn area, during this period?

From a total of ten probate inventories of widows included in the sample, two mention money owed to the testator, or bonds for money held by her (figure 8). When Ellen Tarbock, of Runcorn, died in 1653,¹⁹ her estate was valued at £155-6s. Thomas, her husband, had died nine years earlier, and his estate was valued at £99-15s. At first glance, it would appear that Ellen Tarbock had overcome any obstacles, due to her status, and managed to increase the value of her estate by more than 50%. There is little evidence to show that she did this by means of lending money for a profit, however, as her probate inventory mentions money in bonds to the value of only £6-10s. Conversely, in addition to considerable household goods and utensils, substantial values for crops, livestock, food

produce (especially cheese), and hemp and flax are listed, alongside a spinning wheel and a sitting wheel.

It seems that, whereas Elizabeth Leathwood had lost the income from her husband's business (his trade as a shoemaker) after he died, Ellen Tarbock took in some paid textile work, but continued to live and work at her husband's farm (indeed it can be seen to have thrived under her stewardship).²⁰ A farm, the size of the Tarbock's, would in any event, have required a fair amount of hired help, and therefore the loss of her husband's income would not have presented problems of the same magnitude to Ellen Tarbock, as it did to Elizabeth Leathwood. We can not say that Ellen Tarbock was richer because of her husband's death, but it does seem that his passing did not make her economically vulnerable.

The probate inventory of Joan Smith, of Runcorn (1639), describes an entirely different collection of personal effects. The appraisers of this inventory valued the goods in Joan Smith's house at £8-5s.6d, with another £58-15s. worth of debts owed to her (figure 14). We can see that Joan Smith's probate inventory does not list any crops or livestock, nor is any mention made of working tools, materials, or produce. How then did this widow survive? The local historian H. F. (Bert) Starkey asserts that 'it is a mystery how a poor cooper's widow with effects worth only £8-7s.-8d'²¹ could have debtors owing her so much money.²² Though one cannot be certain, it is tempting to conclude that, since over seven eighths of her estate comprised of debts owing to her, Joan Smith earned her living by lending money and charging interest upon it.

		<u>£ - s - d</u>
Imp.	One brasse pan two potts and two skellets.	.01-13-04
It.	five pewter dishes and two little saucers.	.00-05-00
It.	one flock bed bolsters caddows pillow and coveringe.	.01-10-00
It.	four payre of hemp sheete with other Lynnon.	.01-02-00
It.	four chests.	.00-04-00
It.	two payre of bedstocks one dishbord & chairs and other stuffe.	.00-13-04
It.	one turnell one churn and one tub with other cooperyware.	.00-08-00
It.	one window sheete & pough[?].	.00-01-00
It.	one broach and other iron geeres.	.01-04-00
It.	In coales and muggs.	.00-03-06
It.	her wearing apparell both lynnnon and woollen.	.02-00-00
It.	Debts owinge to ye testator are.	.25-15-00
It.	John Runcorne.	.15-00-00
It.	George Alcocke.	.17-00-00
It.	Elizabeth Berch.	.00-20-00
	<u>Total (not given on inventory)</u>	<u>67-00-06</u>

FIGURE 14. Probate inventory of Joan Smith, widow of Runcorn, died 1639, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1640.

	<u>£ - s. - d</u>
Imp. in Brasse and pewter.	00-02-04
Itm. Iron Toolles and other Iron ware.	00-06-08
Itm. in Hay.	00-06-08
Itm. in Earthen ware.	00-01-00
Itm. a Cupboard, Dishboard, stooles and other wood ware.	00-05-02
Itm. in Bedstockes Bedding and two little Cussens [?].	00-06-00
Itm. in wearing Apparrell.	00-06-08
Itm. in wages due at Weston from Thomas and Peeter Pennington.	00-12-04
Itm. in Corne and Poultry.	00-02-06
	<u>02-09-02</u>

FIGURE 15 Probate inventory of Thomas Runcorn of Runcorn, died 1677 (CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1677).

	<u>£ - s. - d</u>
Item his purse and his aparell.	00-13-04
Item one Cobord.	00-05-00
Item 3 Dublars a sault and one cannellstick.	00-02-00
Item one pot and tow littel pans.	00-05-04
Item foure chests.	00-04-00
Item 3 spads and one ax.	00-02-00
Item for coals and turvs and wood.	00-02-00
Item 3 quisings and tow chairs.	00-01-00
Item one spinning whele with other hustelments.	00-02-00
	[total – 01-18-02]

FIGURE 16. Probate inventory of Will Plase of Knaresborough, 163?. Source: B. Trinder and J. Cox (eds.), Yeomen and Colliers in Telford (London, 1980).

	<u>£ - s. - d</u>
Imprimis Corn and hay.	01-10-00
One old Clock.	01-01-00
two bedds & cloathes necessary.	02-00-00
One Presse.	00-10-00
One old Cupboard.	00-05-00
Old Pewter.	00-06-08
One Boyler or Pan.	01-00-00
Wooden ware.	01-05-00
Muggs Cupps etc.	00-05-00
Iron ware.	00-04-00
One Cow & Calfe.	03-00-00
One Pigg.	<u>00-10-00</u>
	Tot. <u>11-15-08</u>

FIGURE 17, probate inventory of Thomas Carter of Halton, died 1732. (CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1732).

Probate inventories with very low values

The contents of the homes of the very poor (especially those with an estate valued under £5) ought to help provide a clearer picture of the lives of the élite in the Runcorn area. There was no legal requirement for probate inventories to be made for estates with a total value of less than £5, but there is one such inventory in the sample; that of Runcorn carpenter, Thomas Runcorn (1677), whose goods were valued together at a total of £2-9s.-2d (figure 15). This inventory, and those slightly above the £5 threshold, with their meagre lists of possessions, should cast a little light on the means of survival for the poorest members of society, and provide a comparison, from below, with the (relatively comfortable) majority of the Runcorn area's non-élite members of society. Not all of these inventories will relate to the poorest members of society, however. Several of the probate inventories considered here seem to have been compiled after the deceased's estate had been ordered, and household items removed. Either the goods were removed between death and the inventory's compilation, or the deceased had bestowed the goods on the intended benefactors before dying.

Thomas Runcorn's probate inventory lists the goods of a somewhat scantily equipped household. If we subtract the value of his debt (in due wages), crops, livestock and working tools, we are left with the value of his household effects; £1-1s. These household effects include a small amount of brass and pewter, bedding, a small collection of basic furniture and his clothes. There are no cooking utensils, or food containers listed, which might lead us to suppose that Thomas Runcorn had ordered his affairs before dying, keeping only the bare necessities until his death. Whilst this may be the case, it is just as likely that, as he became less able to earn his living, he began to sell off his

possessions, again, keeping only the bare essentials. If this were the case, then we would almost certainly be correct in concluding that Thomas Runcorn's unpaid wages would have placed an enormous strain on his meagre resources, and we could perhaps assume that as a very poor individual, he could have experienced difficulties persuading unwilling debtors to pay him. Either way, it seems a little unusual that he sold, or gave away, all of his food preparation equipment, before all of his furniture, and brass and pewter. If we examine the contents of Will Plase's estate (Knaresborough, Yorkshire, 1630s, figure 16), we can see that, despite his meagre conditions (the inventory does not list a bed), he at least retained some equipment for preparing food.

A similar picture seems to be presented by Thomas Norman's probate inventory (1616). This husbandman from Weston had an estate valued at exactly £5, at his death. As in the case of Thomas Runcorn, livestock and crops comprise a large part of his estate's total value (£1-15s.). There is perhaps a clearer case for arguing that Thomas Norman had ordered his estate before dying. His home seems to have been stripped of all utensils, tools and ornaments. The only household goods appraised were his bed and bedding, clothes and a 'little table.'²³ Again, no food preparation equipment is listed. It is possible that both these inventories are appraisals of very poor men's estates, but the evidence does not rule out the possibility that they were appraisals of men, who had ordered their affairs, and made their bequests, in advance of their demise.

There are other inventories from the sample which suggest that the deceased had ordered his estate before dying. Thomas Burtonwood's probate inventory (1661, a shoemaker from Weston) consists of his bedding and clothes, valued together at 13s.-4d, and a list of debts owed to him totalling £13-16s.-8d. No other goods are mentioned on

the document.²⁴ Another example is that of Halton cooper, Thomas Laithwood (Leathwood). When Thomas Laithwood's estate was appraised in 1672, the final two items on the inventory were:

His clothes and wearing apparell.	. . .	£1-10s.
In debts and ready money.	. . .	£1-10s. ²⁵

These are the only personal belongings listed on the inventory. The rest of his estate comprised of his tools and stock in trade, with a combined value of £14-5s.-3d.²⁶ It seems clear that Thomas Laithwood would have owned more property than is listed on his probate inventory. How and why he came to dispose of the rest of his possessions, we can only guess, but it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that he had made his bequests in advance of his death.

Perhaps the clearest example we have of this practice is the probate inventory of Halton shoemaker, Thomas Carter (1732, figure 17). Written at the top of his probate inventory is the following, 'An Inventory of Eliz: Shakeshafts goods late in the possion of Thomas Carter her father.'²⁷ In his will, Thomas Carter made provision for all his debts, funeral expenses and 'charge of the probate,' to paid out of his personal estate, and the remainder of his estate to pass almost entirely to his daughter Elizabeth Shakeshaft 'for and towards her support and maintenance & to help her to educate and bring up her children.' The sum of 1s. each was to be paid to Thomas' other two daughters, Hannah and Mary (Morriss).²⁸

It seems that Thomas Carter was not a rich man, the description of his clock, and pewter, as 'old' may suggest that he had once been wealthier, but his estate, as appraised in his probate inventory, was a poor collection of goods. Unlike Thomas Runcorn's and Thomas Burtonwood's inventories, however, Carter's seemed to be complete, if very

basic. We know from his will and probate inventory that he had ordered his affairs before he died, and it is tempting to ask whether any of his goods had been removed before appraisal. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the goods Elizabeth Shakeshaft inherited from her father did not all find their way onto his probate inventory. Apart from a clock and the 'old pewter,' the inventory lists only the most basic of items, and it is possible that Elizabeth could have removed a proportion of her father's goods before his probate inventory was made. It is just as likely, however, that Elizabeth Shakeshaft and her father were behaving with propriety, and, by ordering his affairs thoroughly before his death, were merely ensuring that his estate was passed on with as little difficulty as possible.

One could argue that the inventories mentioned above are not accurate reflections of the estates they value, and that they do not in reality relate to the poorest members of society. Although this view has some validity (perhaps especially concerning Thomas Laithwood and Thomas Burtonwood), Thomas Carter's probate inventory seems to be an honest and complete appraisal of his estate. Other than the possibility of appraisers undervaluing goods in probate inventories (as in the case of Thomas Jackson, 1756 and discussed in Chapter 4), there can be no reasonable doubt about the wealth of William Helsby (Weston blacksmith, 1731). The appraisers of this estate valued it at £12-14s.-8d. The final entry is a little intriguing, money in Thomas Ellison's hands. £10-10s.²⁹ We have no details of how this debt came about, or of who Thomas Ellison was. What we can see, is that William Helsby's estate, without this debt, was valued at only £2-4s. Fortunately, the appraisers of this inventory seem to have been fairly assiduous and have given virtually all items a monetary value. It contains a full set of household effects,

including items of furniture, food preparation equipment, spinning wheels and a looking glass, their lowly values hinting at their low quality.

The probate inventory of Thomas Latham (Halton, 1699) tells a similar story. Thomas Latham termed himself a yeoman in his will, but the appraisers of his probate inventory call him a labourer. He seemed to have worked and held land in Halton and at Newton (near Frodsham). This would seem to suggest that he had at one time been a farmer of some means, but the inventory's appraisers' description of his occupation, and the desultory value of his personal possessions show that, by his death he had definitely fallen on hard times, and was earning at least part of his living from building work (as discussed in Chapter 2). Thomas Latham's probate inventory, like William Helsby's, lists a complete set of household goods (without mentioning any debts), and is almost as highly detailed. The combined total value of his apparently shabby and poor quality items was £7-6s.6d. Thomas Latham's probate inventory, like that of William Helsby provides an illustration of the living conditions of the poorer members of society in the Runcorn area during our period.

From the evidence considered in this chapter, we can see that credit was widely used in the Runcorn area (as in other areas) during our period. Whilst this would undoubtedly allow freer trade transactions, we may assume that the disenfranchised members of local society, the poor and widows (who were often very poor themselves, see Elizabeth Leathwood, above), would have suffered considerable difficulties arising from any unpaid debts. Although it is difficult to 'distinguish between money which was invested and simple trade debts,'³⁰ it appears that some local people (Richard Ryder and

William Banne for example) earned a portion of their income from investments. There is also evidence that widows in the area were earning income from loaning money at interest. Both these trends seem to reflect similar practices in other areas, suggesting that the Runcorn area may not have been as isolated from other areas, as had been thought.

It is possible to detect the ordering of affairs before death in some instances where inventories give a low total value. However, we cannot conclude that the estates were really of considerable value, where this has taken place. Given that appraisers of probate inventories would almost certainly have been familiar with the deceased in each case, it would have been difficult to pass off as a pauper an individual known in the local community to be affluent. Further to this, in the one case where we can be certain that the deceased's affairs had been put into order before he died (Thomas Carter, 1732), we can be fairly sure that the estate was already of a relatively low value.

The 'exceptional' probate inventories considered in this chapter remind us that merely counting, and citing average values, can only give a blurred picture. Probate inventories are a record of individuals' estates, and it would be all too easy for a statistical analysis to overlook, or discount, the unusual and exceptional, in pursuit of an overall picture.

Notes to Chapter 3

- ¹ J.S. Moore, 'Probate Inventories: Problems and Prospects' in P. Riden, (ed.) *Probate Records and the Local Community* (Gloucester, 1985), p. 21.
- ² C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (London, 1961, 1974 edition), pp. 55-6.
- ³ From the last will of Richard Acton CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1669.
- ⁴ From the last will of Thomas Jackson CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1669.
- ⁵ See C.B. Phillips, and J.H. Smith (eds.), *Stockport Probate Records 1590-1619*, *The Record Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, Vol 124, 1985; and C.B. Phillips & J.H. Smith, (eds.) *Stockport Probate Records 1620-1650*, *The Record Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, Vol 131, 1992.
- ⁶ See F.W. Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex 1635-1749* (London, 1969).
- ⁷ See B. Trinder, & J. Cox (eds.), *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* (London, 1980).
- ⁸ See P.C.D. Brears, (ed.) *Yorkshire Probate Inventories 1542-1689* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1972).
- ⁹ D. Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1839 edition, republished Gloucester, 1987), pp. 30-1.
- ¹⁰ C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603 – 1714* (London 1974), p. 278.
- ¹¹ B. Capp 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England' in P. Griffiths, A. Fox & S. Hindle (Eds.) *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 124-5.
- ¹² Cited in N. Evans, 'Inheritance, Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern Society as Revealed by Wills' in P. Riden, (ed.) *Probate Records and the Local Community* (Gloucester, 1985), p. 67.
- ¹³ O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her, A History of Women in Western Europe, Volume 1 1500 – 1800* (London, 1995), p. 228.
- ¹⁴ Last will of Thomas Leathwood, WS 1741.
- ¹⁵ F.W. Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex*, p. 20; E. Bruton *Clocks and Watches 1400 – 1900* (London, 1967), pp. 29-38; 52-3; 59.
- ¹⁶ Last will of Thomas Leathwood, WS 1741.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ M. Wiesner, 'Spinning Out Capital: Women's Work in the Early Modern Economy' in R. Bridenhal, C. Koonz & S. Stuard (Eds.), *Becoming Visible, Women in European History* (Boston Mass. 1987), pp. 231-2; and O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, pp. 238-241.
- ¹⁹ The CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE have this document listed as WS 1663 and as WC 1664 (contested will). It appears, however, that the will was contested in 1663/4, but that Ellen Tarbock actually died in 1653; her last will is dated 22 October 1653, and her probate inventory is dated 8 November 1653.
- ²⁰ Although we should consider that 1653 was a year of excellent harvests, C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (London, 1974).
- ²¹ Starkey made a mistake adding the figures.
- ²² H.F. Starkey, *Old Runcorn*, p.63.
- ²³ Probate inventory of Thomas Norman, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1616.
- ²⁴ Probate inventory of Thomas Burtonwood, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1661.
- ²⁵ Probate inventory of Thomas Laithwood (Leathwood), CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1672.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Probate inventory of Thomas Carter, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1732.
- ²⁸ Last will of Thomas Carter, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1732.
- ²⁹ Probate inventory of William Helsby, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WI 1731.
- ³⁰ Trinder and Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, p. 18.

CHAPTER – 4

Rooms: contents and usage

This chapter will examine the contents, and uses of rooms within the homes of the deceased in order to gain a clearer picture of the living conditions of non-élite members of society, in the Runcorn area during this period, and of the everyday objects around them. Where rooms are listed (unfortunately only twenty, out of a total sample of one hundred and one inventories, list items room-by-room), we may be able to gain a clearer picture of individual houses, and the functions of individual rooms. However, these inventories are unlikely to reveal a great deal about how the uses of these rooms changed as our period progressed, because they are predominantly from the years 1720 to 1766 (fourteen inventories), with a further five from the first two decades of the eighteenth century, and only two from the seventeenth century (1677 and 1680). Where inventories exist for several members of one family, it will be interesting to see how the contents of their homes, and, to a limited degree how they used the rooms, changed from one generation to the next. Comparisons between these findings and those from studies of other areas (particularly mid-Essex, Norwich and Telford) might provide further evidence as to the extent of the Runcorn area's economic and social isolation during this period.

Appraisers often valued separate items under one generic term, for instance, 'treenware, earthenware', 'brass and pewter', 'lumber', 'other goods thereto belonging.' The probate inventory, therefore, often offers only an indistinct picture of the household items. Occasionally however, luxury or unusual items were listed separately, presumably because they were just that, unusual. The most commonly occurring individual luxury items in the sample are timepieces, books and mirrors.

FIGURE 18. Probate inventories listing clocks

<u>C.C.R.O. call no. and year</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Township</u>	<u>Listed as</u>	<u>Value £-s.-d</u>
WS 1681	John Buckley	husbandman	Runcorn	a little clock	£00-12-04
WS 1712	Thomas Gregg	yeoman	Runcorn	1 watch	Unknown*
WS 1713	Thomas bold	cooper	Halton	watch in house	£00-02-01
WS 1722	Thomas Cawley	yeoman	Halton	clock	Unknown*
WS 1721	John Chow	yeoman	Halton	A Clock	£00-15-00
WS 1728	Thomas Leathwood	shoemaker	Halton	one clock	£01-05-00
WS 1730	Thomas Cawley	yeoman	Halton	One clock and case	£02-00-00
WI 1732	Thomas Carter	shoemaker	Halton	One old Clock	£01-01-00
WI 1741	Elizabeth Leathwood	widow	Halton	An old Cock	£00-10-00
WS 1741	Samuel Runcorn	yeoman	Runcorn	a Clock	£04-00-00
WS 1742	John Byron	maltster	Hatton	One Clock and Case	£03-00-00
WS 1752	Job Hurstfield	yeoman	Halton	One Clock and Case Watch	£02-15-00 Unknown*
WS 1756	Thomas Jackson	not stated	Halton	a clock	£01-10-00
WS 1761	Robert Lydiate	yeoman	Halton	the clock and clockcase	£02-05-00
WS 1766	John Smith	yeoman	Runcorn	a clock & case	£04-04-00

** denotes listed with
other items*

Timepieces

In all, fifteen inventories list timepieces (see figure 18). Unfortunately, appraisers gave little detail about the clocks and watches they listed, five were listed as ‘clock and case,’ suggesting that they were imported Dutch clocks.¹ Two were listed as ‘old clocks,’ which may suggest that they were, by this time, old fashioned lantern clocks (as discussed in Chapter 3). Values of clocks, as appraised in the probate inventories varied from the highest, at £4-4s. (John Smith, 1766), to 10s.(Elizabeth Leathwood, 1741), although Elizabeth Leathwood’s clock had been valued at £1-5s., thirteen years earlier (as stated in Chapter 3), the next lowest value was 13s.-4d (John Buckley, 1681). Four inventories list watches, but only two provide individual values. The probate inventory of Samuel Runcorn (1741), who also owned a clock valued at £4, lists his ‘old silver watch at £1-10s.;² Samuel Burch’s probate inventory (1713) lists his watch separately, with a precise value of 2s.-1d. That of Thomas Gregg (1712) gives no real clue as to the value of his watch as it is listed with other items:

In the House – 2 Cupboards 1 Table 1 Coach Chair	
1 Watch Iron Geer and Pewter	
Stooles and Chairs.	in all £4-10s. ³

The probate inventory of John Byron (a maltster, of Hatton, 1742) lists his watch along with his clothes (which seems reasonable), with their combined value judged to be £1-10s.

As stated in Chapter 3, during this period, the production of weight and spring clocks increased in England, and long-case, pendulum clocks were being imported from the Netherlands, both types of clock gained popularity at the expense of the traditional lantern clock.⁴ We can see that the earliest recorded entry of a timepiece occurs in the

probate inventory of John Buckley (WS 1681), a husbandman of Runcorn, whose 'little clock' was valued at 13s.-6d.⁵ All the other timepieces are listed in inventories dating from the eighteenth century, with at least one clock apparently appraised on two inventories, those of Thomas Leathwood and his widow, Elizabeth (covered in Chapter 3). It may appear that the Runcorn area was a little behind mid-Essex in this respect, where clocks are mentioned in probate inventories of 1670 and 1679. However, the unpredictable survival rate of probate inventories makes this conclusion unreliable. Nevertheless, the evidence from the Runcorn area, and also Telford,⁶ where clocks were more frequently mentioned in probate inventories, as the eighteenth century progressed, and they became cheaper,⁷ broadly matches that from mid-Essex.

Perhaps this increase of timepiece ownership is an indication of economic reorganisation, with an increased awareness of clock time being necessary for those involved in expanding industries. This case is made by Trinder and Cox, in their study of probate inventories from the Telford area (where the iron industry, particularly, was expanding during our period).⁸ Whilst the Industrial Revolution was yet to make its presence felt directly in the Runcorn area, maritime trade was certainly increasing (partly, at least, on the back of industrial activities elsewhere), and it may be valid to apply Trinder's and Cox's argument. If we examine the occupation of those people who owned clocks, we may be able to determine whether the argument that increasing need for awareness of clock time, for reasons of expansion in industry and trade, can validly be applied to the Runcorn area.

Of the fifteen inventories which mention timepieces, eight are from yeomen, two from shoemakers, one each from a cooper, a maltster a widow, and (the earliest) a

husbandman. If we accept that yeomen in the Runcorn area rarely branched out into other areas of economic activity (as argued in the Chapter 2), then increasing clock ownership amongst the local yeomanry is unlikely to have been spurred directly by industrial reorganisation and growth. Similarly, the two shoemakers on the list (Thomas Leathwood, 1728, and Thomas Carter, 1732, both of Halton), were unlikely to have been directly involved in the area's industry-driven growth in maritime trade. The clock belonging to Elizabeth Leathwood (1741) is almost certainly the same one as that listed in her husband's inventory (as stated in Chapter 3), and her ownership of it is derived from her husband's. The probate inventory John Byron (listed in the Record Office as from Halton, but actually from Hatton, in the Chapelry of Daresbury) indicates that he was a prosperous maltster, with considerable agricultural interests. The position of his home, approximately halfway between Runcorn and Warrington, does not necessarily preclude an involvement in industry and trade, but it seems unlikely, and his probate inventory offers no evidence of it.

Thomas Jackson's probate inventory (Halton, 1756) suggests that he was a fairly wealthy cooper, with a significant interest in agriculture; his estate was valued at £86-16s., but was contested some fifteen years after his death, and it transpired that his goods, when sold, realised the sum of £206-16s. Perhaps increasing local trade aided his apparently successful business as a cooper, but this would seem thin evidence that his ownership of a clock was a response to industrial expansion. It appears that Trinder's and Cox's suggestion that timepiece ownership may have grown with an increased need for awareness of clock time, as 'one of the preconditions for new forms of economic organisation,'⁹ does not necessarily apply in the Runcorn area.

Illustrations of clocks removed due to
copyright

FIGURE 23 probate inventories listing books

C.C.R.O. call no. and year	Name	Occupation	Township	Listed as	Value £-s.-d
WS 1681	John Buckley	husbandman	Runcorn	a little clock	£00-12-04
WS 1712	Thomas Gregg	yeoman	Runcorn	1 watch	Unknown*
WS 1721	John Chow	yeoman	Halton	A Clock	£00-15-00
WS 1728	Thomas Leathwood	shoemaker	Halton	one clock	£01-05-00
WS 1730	Thomas Cawley	yeoman	Halton	One clock and case	£02-00-00
WI 1741	Elizabeth Leathwood	widow	Halton	An old Cock	£00-10-00
WI 1732	Thomas Carter	shoemaker	Halton	One old Clock	£11-15-08
WS 1741	Samuel Runcorn	yeoman	Runcorn	a Clock	£04-00-00
				An Old Silver Watch	£01-10-00
WS 1742	John Byron	maltster	Hatton	One Clock and Case	£03-00-00
WS 1752	Job Hurstfield	yeoman	Halton	One Clock and Case	£02-15-00
				Watch	Unknown*
WS 1756	Thomas Jackson	cooper	Halton	a clock	£01-10-00
WS 1766	John Smith	yeoman	Runcorn	a clock & case	£04-04-00
WS 1761	Robert Lydiate	yeoman	Halton	the clock and clockcase	£02-05-00
WS 1722	Thomas Cawley	yeoman	Halton	clock	Unknown*

*denotes listed with other items

Books

From a sample of one hundred and one probate inventories, only thirteen list books, the earliest mentioned belonged to Edward Kendrick, a clerk of Runcorn (1625), and second earliest was that of Robert Gregg (1632), a yeoman of Weston. The next eight all date from the seventeenth century, the remaining three date from the early eighteenth century (see figure23). The distribution of probate inventories which list books seems to be consistent through time, given that almost three quarters of the sample (73 out of 101), date from before 1700. If we can assume that, generally, levels of literacy were increasing, then these figures seem surprising; one would have expected books to become more common in later probate inventories. Perhaps for some reason, appraisers stopped listing books separately, and valued them together with other items, although it is difficult to detect where this might be the case.

We may expect people such as John Chow (1721) and John Smith (1766) to have owned books, but their probate inventories do not list them. John Chow's estate was valued at £353-4s. Perhaps any books he owned were valued and included in the item, 'A Table, ffive Chairs two Spoons and other goods in the House,' but the combined value of these goods was appraised at only £1,¹⁰ so this seems unlikely. The appraisers of innkeeper, John Smith's extensive, and detailed, probate inventory (1766) valued his estate at £92-8s.-1 ½d. It lists many luxury items, including twenty three prints spread between three separate rooms, but no mention is made of books. Unlike John Chow's inventory, there is not even a vague entry, which might include books amongst other goods. Similarly, the probate inventories of Robert Lydiate (1761), who owned a map of the world, and John Byron (1742), who owned two maps and fourteen pictures, do not

mention books. Perhaps people had begun to order their estates, before they died (as discussed in Chapter 3¹¹), and with books being valuable commodities, or family heirlooms, their intended recipients took possession of them before the testator's death, or at least before appraisal of the estate. For whatever reason, some of the most highly valued probate inventories from the sample make no mention of books, and none do so later than 1730.

Of the thirteen inventories to list books, four specify their titles. Perhaps unsurprisingly, each of these names The Bible; Robert Gregg (1632), of Weston, Thomas Tarbuck (1647), of Runcorn, John Kerfoot (1694), of Halton, and Thomas Cawley (1730), of Halton. Only Robert Gregg's names another title, 'a Bible and Coopers Dictionarie.'¹² In each of the thirteen inventories, books are listed in the plural, indicating that several volumes were appraised in each case. We may assume that items listed as 'books' or 'all his/the books' would have included The Bible, but apart from The Bible, and Thomas Gregg's dictionary, the inventories provide no clues as to the titles, or even genres, of books owned and read in the Runcorn area during our period.

This corresponds with Steer's findings in Mid-Essex, where the earliest mention of books occurs in 1638, and the only books referred to by title are The Bible and, in one inventory only, 'The Book of Martyrs.' Steer asserts that 'The Book of Martyrs' would have been the work of John Foxe, which, together with The Bible, would, he argues, have been 'essential' to the library of any seventeenth century gentleman.¹³ It could be that copies of this tome account for some of the books appraised in probate inventories from the Runcorn area, but the appraisals definitely indicate at least three books, in five instances, and only Thomas Gregg's inventory definitely indicates the presence of no

more than two. Jonathon Hale's library seems to have been particularly extensive. When he died, in 1704, his probate inventory listed 'all the books' at £2-10s.¹⁴

Mirrors

Eight inventories from the sample mentioned looking glasses (mirrors). With the exception of Thomas Darwell's (1677), a surgeon from Halton, all date from 1720 to 1766 (see figure 24). The relative values of the looking glasses concerned varies markedly. Thomas Darwell's looking glass was valued at 4d, in 1677, and in 1731, the looking glass in William Helsby's probate inventory was deemed to be worth 6d. Conversely, Jonathon Hale (1704) and John Byron (1742), had mirrors worth 5s. and 15s. respectively. John Smith's inventory (1766) illustrates the varying value (and one must suppose, quality) of looking glasses. He owned two mirrors; listed in a lodging room is a looking glass, valued at 1s., and in an upstairs room (possibly part of his private apartment), another looking glass, with a value of 12s.-6d.

Weapons

We may expect weapons to be listed fairly frequently in the probate inventories of our period, especially perhaps, in those of people who had lived through the Civil War, given the levels of military movement through the area. However, only three inventories in the sample appear to list and value weapons; those of Robert Gregg (1632), John Buckley (1681) and Catherine Tarbuck (1720). In the case of Robert Gregg (a yeoman, of Weston), it is probably safer to conclude that his dagger was not a weapon, as such, but

rather a part of his farming equipment, given the context of its entry in his probate inventory:

Two sickles and a chopping knife.	.	0-0-4d
3 sickles more and a dagger.	.	0-0-10d ¹⁵

There is no such doubt in John Buckley's probate inventory. Buckley was a relatively prosperous husbandman from Runcorn, whose personal effects, though not particularly extensive, were appraised with a reasonable attention to detail. The last item on his inventory is, 'a sword saddle & ye rest of his wearing apparrell..£2-00-00.'¹⁶ Unfortunately, we do not know how old Buckley was, when he died, and therefore cannot be sure that he had not lived through the Civil War, but it seems more likely that his sword, if it ever saw military action in his own hand, it would have been in one of the later, international, wars against the Dutch, or Spanish. Whatever the military history of Buckley's sword, his probate inventory suggests that he routinely wore it. The appraisers of this detailed inventory, who almost certainly knew the deceased personally, listing the sword along with 'the rest' of his clothing, would seem to indicate this. It is possible that John Buckley wore his sword regularly, because of local lawlessness, and the need for self defence. However, the lack of weaponry mentioned in other contemporary, local probate inventories, though not necessarily ruling it out, would seem to argue against this.

The last item on the unusual probate inventory (it states that it is an inventory of the goods of 'John Tarbuck and Katherine his wife both late deceased'),¹⁷ of Katherine Tarbuck (1720), appraised amongst other goods in the chamber, is 'an old gun and some linnen...2s.6d. ' Whilst we cannot be sure, it seems that the gun was used for hunting, as the item which directly precedes it is 'a steel trap and lumber... 15s.'¹⁸

FIGURE 24. Probate inventories listing looking glasses

C.C.R.O. call no. and year	Name	Occupation	Township	Value of looking glass £-s.-d
WS 1677	Thomas Darwell	surgeon	Halton	4d
WS 1704	Jonathon Hale	gentleman	Halton	5s.
WS 1720	John Chadwick	gentleman	Halton	unknown*
WS 1721	Mary Jackson	widow	Halton	unknown
WI 1731	William Helsby	blacksmith	Weston	6d
WS 1742	John Byron	maltster	Halton	15s.
WS 1752	Job Hurstfield	millar	Halton	unknown*
WS 1761	Robert Lydiate	yeoman	Halton	unknown*
WS 1766	John Smith	yeoman/innkeeper	Runcorn	1 at 1s. & 1 at 12s.-6d

*denotes listed with other items

Other luxury items

Though the evidence from probate inventories largely suggests that non-élite members of society enjoyed relatively basic living conditions, some of the more detailed inventories from our sample reveal concessions to comfort or leisure. In addition to the clocks and books, discussed above, and cushions, which were fairly commonly listed, (though with no detail as to what they were made of, or their appearance), several other luxury items, or considerations of comfort, were to be found in the homes of the deceased.

The probate inventories from this sample rarely mention artificial light. Candle sticks (made of brass, iron, pewter, tin, or wire) are a common entry in the surviving probate inventories of mid-Essex,¹⁹ but not in our sample. Perhaps appraisers in the Runcorn area tended to value them in with other brass, iron, tin and pewter goods in inventories. Exceptions include the inventory of John Smith, who had five iron candlesticks, with a value 2s.6d, and two brass ones, valued at 1s.6d.; Robert Lydiate (1761, of Halton), who had candle sticks of brass and of iron (listed with other brass and iron goods); and John Byon (1742) who had a 'grate jack other irons and brass candlesticks' valued together at 18s.²⁰ Two probate inventories from the sample mention lanterns; William Whitely (1631) and John Buckley (1681). William Whiteley's inventory contains the item, 'for a lanterne and a bread grater[?]...8d.'²¹ John Buckley's lantern was appraised singularly, a lanthorne... 1s.'²²

Spoons, and silver spoons are occasionally listed, sometimes together with other items, as is the case with John Chow's inventory (1721), 'A table, ffive Chairs two spoons with other goods in the House... £1-00-00.'²³ The probate inventories of Thomas

Birchenhead (1625), Robert Gregg, (1632) and John King (1636) are more revealing. Thomas Birchenhead was a relatively wealthy husbandman from Weston, with an estate valued at £96-2s.-8d, his two silver spoons were valued at 16s.-6d. Robert Gregg was a Weston yeoman, who owned two silver spoons, with a value of 16s. out of an estate valued in total at £97-19s. John King (1635), a clerk from Halton, whose estate was valued at £112-11s., owned two silver spoons with a combined total worth of 10s.

Close stools and chamber pots (which were maybe not luxury items, but were certainly a significant concession to comfort) occur occasionally, for instance, John Jackson (1712) and Mary Jackson (1721), as do the intriguingly titled ‘crap pots’ and ‘crap pans.’ These items are unlikely to be related to the modern interpretation of the word ‘crap,’ however, which only dates from the mid nineteenth century. It seems that these items are so named as a corruption of ‘crab pan’ and ‘crab pot’ (used in the processing of apple juice), or, perhaps more likely, from crap’s original meaning, ‘“chaff”, later “residue from rendering fat”, also “dregs of beer.”’²⁴

John Byron owned what we may presume to be a barometer, or perhaps, thermometer, ‘one Whether glass and Grate...£0-3s.6d.’²⁵ A blind horse (by definition a luxury) is appraised in the probate inventory of Thomas Jackson (1756). It is listed with a young colt, with a combined value of £2-2s., though the veracity of this valuation may be open to question, given the massive under-valuation of this estate (as stated above). John Smith (1766), who may have had some dealings in the Netherlands, judging by the amount of items in his inventory, described as Dutch (a Dutch oven and two Dutch Tables, and a clock and case, of probable Dutch origin²⁶) had a coffee pot worth 2s. and two tobacco tins valued together at 2d.

John Smith's tobacco tins are a good illustration of why we ought to be very careful, when drawing conclusions from statistical analyses of probate inventories. No other inventory in the sample mentions tobacco, or any smoking accoutrements, yet we know that tobacco had been introduced into England before the end of the sixteenth century, and that in mid-Essex tobacco, snuff and relevant accessories occur on probate inventories from as early as 1689.²⁷ Work on probate inventories from Telford has shown that tobacco use was widespread during the seventeenth century, 'an almost universal habit,' and was even used as a medicine for children. The probate inventory of Thomas Calcott (1744, of Wrockwardine, Shropshire) lists the contents of a smoking room.²⁸ Was the Runcorn area so isolated, that the tobacco habit had yet to take hold, or do probate inventories not give the whole picture?

Archaeologists working at Halton Castle have excavated clay pipes dating back to the early seventeenth century.²⁹ Further archaeological work around Norton Priory and Norton Village, has confirmed that tobacco had been smoked continuously in the area, since at least the early seventeenth century.³⁰ It appears, for whatever reason, that (John Smith notwithstanding) tobacco accessories did not find their way onto probate inventories in our area. One can understand why clay pipes did not; they were disposable items. Perhaps, given a tobacco tin's low value (one penny each, in John Smith's highly detailed inventory), appraisers tended to value them together with other goods. It may be surprising that more expensive accessories, such as decorative silver tins and boxes, are not mentioned, but it would be erroneous to infer from a lack of evidence in local probate inventories, that tobacco was not widely used in the Runcorn area throughout almost all of our period.

Room use

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the sample cannot provide evidence of changes in the use of rooms, throughout our period, as the inventories, which name rooms are largely from the same few decades. Nevertheless, the information contained on these probate inventories will provide evidence of the various uses of named rooms, and whether trends in other areas, such as modernising, or extending houses, are mirrored in the Runcorn area. Peter Brears' work with Yorkshire probate inventories shows that the parlour room had gradually developed from a bed-sitting room into a dining room, during the seventeenth century.³¹ Work undertaken on Norwich inventories also shows this trend,³² and suggests that a considerable amount of 're-organisation and subdivision' of rooms was carried out in houses, during the latter half of the seventeenth century.³³ This suggests that domestic standards and living styles were developing, as different domestic activities were being confined to separate rooms, for instance, sleeping and eating.

However, it can be seen that this change in use of the parlour was not happening in the Runcorn area, until much later. Fifteen inventories name a parlour. Of these, eleven indicate that parlours continued to be used as an all-purpose bed-sitting room, well into the eighteenth century. These include; Runcorn weaver, Samuel Burch (1716), Runcorn widow, Katherine tarbuck (1720), Halton shoe maker, Thomas Leathwood (1728), and Halton cooper, Thomas Jackson (1756). The four which do not list beds as part of their contents are; Halton gentleman, John Chadwick (1724), Hatton maltster, John Byron (1742), Halton yeoman, Robert Lydiate (1761), and Runcorn innkeeper, John Smith (1766). Here we have evidence that the Runcorn area was probably lagging behind other parts of the country. Unlike the differences in the recording of tobacco and its

accessories, which seem to be entirely due to different appraising procedures, rather than a difference in smoking habits, the parlour room's later evolution in the Runcorn area does appear to indicate a slower development of social and domestic trends.

Unfortunately, it is not so easy to detect such a trend, when we examine the function of the buttery. In Norwich, by the end of the sixteenth century, this room had largely lost its original function as a store of (especially liquid) household provisions, and began to be put to a wider variety of uses. These included storage for utensils and household pewter, and sometimes for cooking and preparing food (usually in smaller homes).³⁴ Of the twenty probate inventories from the sample which name individual rooms, fourteen mention the buttery. Ten of these inventories (dating from 1677 to 1766) list contents that would suggest the buttery had lost its original purpose and was functioning more as a general household store. Examples include Thomas Darwell (1677), 'one little table and form in ye buttery';³⁵ Thomas Gregg (1712), 'treenware and muggs and a little pewter';³⁶ and Robert Lydiate (1761), 'nine pewter dishes seven plates ...'.³⁷ One of these inventories (though not from one of the smaller homes) also lists contents that offer evidence that the buttery was being used for cooking and preparing food. John Smith, the innkeeper (1766), as we may have expected, had an extensive list of cooking equipment in his buttery. We can perhaps safely conclude that this equipment (including a Dutch oven) would have been used in the running of his inn.

One inventory mentions the buttery, but does not appraise any goods from within it. The appraisers of Halton yeoman, John Jackson's probate inventory (1711) list and value goods 'In ye Buttery Chamber',³⁸ which would indicate the existence of a buttery, probably below, at ground level. In addition to the 'buttery chamber', three more are

mentioned; 'parlour chamber', 'middle chamber' and 'house chamber.' There are, however, only three rooms mention on the lower level; the 'parlour' and 'house,' which would both seem to have corresponding rooms above, and the 'dining room.' It might be the case that the buttery contained food and drink for Jackson's family's consumption, and would not have been valued as part of the estate, suggesting that the buttery had retained its original purpose. Whilst this explanation would present us with a picture of a dwelling with an equal number of rooms above and below stairs, we would expect that if this were the case, then the 'middle chamber' would have been named as the 'dining room chamber' on Jackson's probate inventory. It seems more realistic to argue that the dining room was an amalgamation of two downstairs rooms, one of them being originally the buttery. This argument seems even more convincing when one considers the probate inventory of John Jackson's widow, Mary (1721), which lists items together in the buttery and dining room, some of which are itemised in the dining room in her husband's inventory.

The inventory of William Kirkman, a Halton yeoman (1719, two copies of which survive) mentions the buttery, but gives no clue to the room's function, 'all ye goods in ye buttery below the lower floor.'³⁹ Perhaps in this case, the buttery contained household provisions, and the appraisers only valued the containers, though it is a little surprising that these are not named. It seems more likely that the goods in this room, and the chamber below the lower floor were originally omitted from the inventory, and added later with a nominal value. The fact that the two items seem to be squeezed into one copy, between two other items, and in much smaller writing, would appear to support this (figures 25 & 26).

all the brass & pewter	26-00-00
all the iron goods	3-00-00
all the chears and stools & forms in house	00-09-00
all the goods in y ^e chamber below y ^e lower floor	00-10-00
all y ^e goods in y ^e buttery below y ^e lower floor	00-10-00
all the goods in the kitchen	00-12-00
all y ^e goods belonging to husbandry ware	01-14-00
all y ^e corn	6-00-00
all y ^e hay	36-00-00

FIGURES 25 & 26.

Two copies were made of William Kirkman's probate inventory. Appraisals of the goods in the buttery, and chamber below the lower floor, seem to have been inserted (above). It is possible that a second fair copy was made (below).

all the brass and pewter	3-00-00
all the iron goods	00-09-00
all the chears and stools and forms in the house	00-10-00
all the goods in the chamber below the lower floor	00-10-00
all the goods in the buttery below the lower floor	00-12-00
all the goods in the kitchen	01-17-00
all the goods belonging to the husbandry ware	06-00-00
all the corn	06-00-00
all the hay	10-00-00

Although the probate inventories from our sample offer no firm evidence that butteries in the Runcorn area retained their original function for longer than in Norwich, two inventories perhaps suggest that their butteries were in transition from their original use as provisions stores to their new one as utensils stores. The goods in the buttery, listed in John Byron's inventory (1742), show a possible mixture of old and new functions:

Seven Dishes two Dozen of plates16s.
Salting Turnell & Barrells12s.-6d
Cheese Tubb and Remainder of Wood ware	.07s.-6d
Bottles Muggs or Earthen ware08s.-6d ⁴⁰

Job Hurstfield's inventory (1752) shows a similar mix, perhaps suggesting a gradually changing function of the buttery:

Two Pewter Dishes1s.6d
One frying pan and all the mugs and Bottles..	2s.6d ⁴¹

Given that only two of the sample's inventories, which name rooms, date from the seventeenth century, and none from the first half of that century, we have no firm evidence of when butteries in the Runcorn area changed their function, relative to those in Norwich. The evidence from the inventories, which suggest a retention (or part retention) of the buttery's original function is far from strong enough to indicate a later evolution of butteries in the Runcorn area, although (bearing the inventories of Job Hurstfield and John Byron in mind) this argument cannot be entirely dismissed.

Comparisons within families

Where estates can be seen to have passed from person to another, and probate inventories for both parties survive, we ought to be able to glean some information as to individual family's economic fluctuations. How estates fared in the hands of widows (or

more accurately, how women fared with the status of widowhood) has been discussed in Chapter 3. It will be interesting to see how estates fared in the hands of people who did not have face the pressures and obstacles that widows had to endure and overcome; men who operated under the same set of rules as their fathers.

Although the sample contains probate inventories in family groups, apart from some widows' inventories, it is often difficult to establish how they were related. For instance, the Halton yeomen, Thomas Cawley senior (1722) and Thomas Cawley junior (1730), who both appraised the probate inventory of John Jackson in 1712. It seems reasonable to assume that these two men were closely related, but they were not father and son. Thomas Cawley senior named three children in his will; John (the eldest), Hannah and Robert, but no son called Thomas seems to have survived him.⁴² Fortunately, in some instances, we can be fairly sure of the relationships between the testator of one inventory and another. These ought to prove illustrative of any fluctuating economic fortunes, when the probate inventories concerned relate to father and son. However, bearing in mind the under valuation of John Jackson's estate in 1756 (see above), we must exercise caution, and not hurry to conclusions concerning relative wealth, drawn from the values of estates recorded in probate inventories.

It might be the case that Randle and William Norman (yeomen of Weston, 1627 and 1636, respectively) were father and son, or grandfather and grandson. Randle named his eldest son as William in his will,⁴³ though William termed himself 'William the Yonger' in his,⁴⁴ which may indicate that his father was Randle's son. Whilst it is uncertain which (if either) relationship is the case, it appears that Randle and William were closely related. If the estate left by William had been inherited from Randle (either

directly, or indirectly), then it had grown tremendously in the intervening nine years, from £19-8s.5d to £157-7s.-8d. William's probate inventory (which is a much more extensive and more highly detailed one than Randle's) contains lists of debtors, and creditors (£22-19s. of William's estate was comprised of money owed to him, in turn, he owed debts to the value of £42-8s.-9d). If we subtract what William owed from the value of his estate, we are left with £114-18s.-11d, still almost six times the value of Randle's estate. It could be the case that Randle had debts owed to him, but had kept them quiet, in order to protect himself from having to pay extra taxes, or make a forced (interest free) loan to the Crown, as could be liable to happen in the mid 1620s.⁴⁵ Even if Randle was owed debts, which were not appraised as part of his estate, it is extremely unlikely that they would have amounted to the difference between the value of his estate and that of William's.

Whilst remembering that appraised values of estates could be wildly inaccurate, we may conclude that, if the estate was indeed the same one as Randle bequeathed to his son, William, then the family had very quickly grown wealthy. This could have been achieved through a marriage dowry, or the dowries of two marriages, if Randle and William were separated by two generations (more goods were indeed listed in the later inventory, which might support this), but if this is the case the probate inventory of William the elder has not survived.

We appear to be safer in assuming that John Berkenhead (1670) and Richard Berkenhead (1684) were father and son. John's will names three sons, John Samuel and Richard. In it he leaves all his goods to Richard and names John and Richard as executors; John and Samuel are two of the four named appraisers of the probate

inventory.⁴⁶ In the fourteen years between the deaths of John and Richard, the estate's value had grown in value from £57-17s.-10d to £72-1s. Although Richard Berkenhead's probate inventory valued his estate at £90-1s., it seems that the appraisers miscalculated the total, by reading three rather ambiguous figure *1*s, as 7s. Given that the items listed were 'chairs stooles and cushions', 'Train [treen?] ware' and 'Bacon and other meat', the values of £1, £1 and £1-15s. respectively, seem more realistic than £7, £7 and £7-15s. Further to this, the figures, though ambiguous, do resemble the other figure *1*s on the document, more closely than the figure 7s.⁴⁷

The difference between the relative values of these estates seems to come about, not because there are more items to list and value, but rather because the same, or similar items have increased in value. For instance, in 1670, John Berkenhead owned cows and calves, valued at £11-13s.11d on his probate inventory. By 1684, the value of cattle owned by Richard was £20, plus £2-14s. for 'a cow that was sold'⁴⁸ and the value of the estate's sheep had risen from 18s. to £1-10. Similarly, The brass and pewter was valued together at £5-10s. in 1670, in 1684 it was valued at £7, and the collective value of the carts, ploughs and other husbandry ware seems to have risen in value, from £3-5s. to £5-10s. Further examples include the chairs, stools and cushions, valued at £1 in 1684 (see above), and only deemed to be worth 16s. in 1670. Conversely the value of pigs dropped from £2-6s. in 1670 to £1 in 1684, and it is difficult to explain how 'four horses two mares one colt' could be worth £3 in 1670, whilst fourteen years later 'an old mare a horse and a colt' were worth £8.⁴⁹

In Chapter 3, we discussed the fall in fortunes of the Muskett family of Higher Runcorn. Whilst we cannot be sure of the reasons for this decline, their probate

inventories provide evidence of how it manifested itself in the declared values of the family's possessions (see figures 8 & 9 Chapter3). The appraised values of John Muskett's livestock, crops and agricultural equipment in 1720, were all lower than in 1690. The cattle were given a value of £40 in 1690, and only £15, in 1720. Samuel Muskett's corn and hay were valued at £40 in 1690, by the time of John's death in 1720, the estate's corn and hay were valued at £9. In 1690 the combined total of the estate's farming equipment was appraised at £5-10s., the appraisers of John Muskett's probate inventory, thirty years later valued the same type of equipment at £3. This decline can also be seen in the household effects. In 1690, Samuel's clothes were valued at £5, John's were valued at £1, in 1720. Brass and pewter, valued at £4 in 1690, was deemed to be worth only £1-5s. in 1720. The value of Samuel Muskett's household effects (discounting crops, livestock, farming implements and money owed to him) was £15-7s. By 1720, the same genre of goods in John Muskett's probate inventory were valued at £8-3s.

Whilst the evidence from the Norman family's probate inventories presents us with a picture of a family rapidly improving its economic position, it is inconclusive regarding how this improvement in fortune came about, and how it was reflected in goods, owned and used in the home. The probate inventories of the Berkenhead and Muskett families also indicate fluctuating economic fortunes, but seem to offer a better calibre of evidence concerning the reflection of these changes in their personal possessions. It could perhaps be argued that the Berkenhead family (or at least the direct male line of it) steadily grew more prosperous between 1670 and 1684, which would seem reasonable against a national economic background of bad harvests and depression in the early 1670s, followed by a period largely of recovery and boom.⁵⁰ The evidence

from the probate inventories of John and Samuel Muskett suggests that their family experienced a slow decline in economic fortune, which also seems reasonable, when viewed against the prevailing national economic conditions.⁵¹

The evidence considered in this chapter provides us with a slightly clearer picture of the living conditions of non-élite members of local society, as well as the nature and extent of the Runcorn area's economic and social isolation during our period. We can see from the contents of their homes, that luxury items of various levels of quality and value were to be found, and concessions to leisure and personal comfort were made. It could be argued that patterns of ownership of such items as clocks, books and mirrors broadly matches those from other areas considered; Telford, Norwich and mid-Essex. However, it seems that increasing clock ownership in the Runcorn area, during our period, cannot be ascribed to industrial expansion and reorganisation, as may have been the case in the Telford area. The omission of tobacco and its accessories from all but the latest inventory from the sample (John Smith, Runcorn innkeeper, 1766), reminds us that probate inventories can be an unreliable source. Archaeological work carried out locally has shown that tobacco was as popular in the Runcorn area, as elsewhere during our period.

The changing functions of parlours and butteries during our period illustrates that the area did not always keep up with trends in other regions, and that . Whilst the evidence concerning butteries is not conclusive, it would seem reasonable to argue that by the beginning of the eighteenth century (at the latest), the buttery in our area was rarely used as a store for provisions (especially drink), and had taken on a new, wider rôle in the home, as a general household utensils store. It might be the case that this changing

function of the buttery occurred later here than elsewhere; the evidence does not necessarily preclude this, but is not strong enough to present a convincing argument.

The evidence from parlours is more conclusive. Whereas, in Yorkshire and Norwich, the parlour had ceased to be used as an all-purpose, family bed-sitting room, and began to function as a dining room during the seventeenth century, beds were still being recorded in parlour rooms well into the eighteenth century in the Runcorn area. The four probate inventories from the latter end of the sample, which do not list beds in parlour rooms (John Chadwick (1724), John Byron (1742), Robert Lydiate (1761) and John Smith (1766), show that this development and its attendant change in domestic arrangements were perhaps beginning to take place, albeit at least half a century later than in Norwich and Yorkshire.

Although it seems that homes were perhaps smaller and less refined than in other regions, the contents of rooms in probate inventories from the Runcorn area do not seem radically different from those elsewhere. Access to items such as books and clocks indicates ~~a~~ that this part of North Cheshire had significant contact with other areas. Given this, it would seem fair to argue that, if not exactly well-connected, non-élite members of society in the Runcorn area were not entirely isolated from changing trends in other parts of the country.

Notes to Chapter 4

- ¹ F.W. Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex 1635-1749* (London, 1969), p. 20.
- ² Probate inventory of Samuel Runcorn, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1741.
- ³ Probate inventory of Thomas Gregg, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1712.
- ⁴ Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories*, p. 20.
- ⁵ Probate inventory of John Buckley, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1681.
- ⁶ B. Trinder & J. Cox (eds.), *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* (London, 1980), pp. 100-101 & 114.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.100-101; Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories*, p. 20.
- ⁸ Trinder & Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, pp. 100-101.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101 & 114.
- ¹⁰ Probate inventory of John Chow, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1721.
- ¹¹ U. Priestly & P.J. Corfield, 'Rooms and Room Use in Norwich Housing, 1580-1730' in *Post Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 16, (1982), p.95
- ¹² Probate inventory of Robert Gregg, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1730.
- ¹³ Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories*, p. 48.
- ¹⁴ Probate inventory of Jonathon Hale, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1704.
- ¹⁵ Probate inventory of Robert Gregg, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1632.
- ¹⁶ Probate inventory of John Buckley, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1681.
- ¹⁷ Probate inventory of Catherine Tarbuck, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1720. The appraisers of this inventory spelled her name with a 'K', in her will, her name is spelt, 'Catherine.'
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories*, p. 21.
- ²⁰ Probate inventory of John Byron, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1742.
- ²¹ Probate inventory of William Whitely, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1631.
- ²² Probate inventory of John Buckley, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1681.
- ²³ Probate inventory of John Chow, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1721.
- ²⁴ Definition of 'crap', Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford, 1998)
- ²⁵ Probate inventory of John Byron, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1742.
- ²⁶ See note 4, this chapter & note. 14, Chapter 3.
- ²⁷ Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories*, pp. 48-9.
- ²⁸ Trinder & Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, pp. 28 & 38.
- ²⁹ P. Blackmore and N. Lewis, 'The Clay Pipes, The Introduction of Pipe Smoking into Britain' in R. McNeil (ed.), *Halton Castle, a Visual Treasure* North West Archaeological Trust Report No. 1 (Liverpool, 1987).
- ³⁰ P. Davey *Clay Pipes from Norton Priory* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 170-212.
- ³¹ Introduction to P.C.D. Brears, (ed.) *Yorkshire Probate Inventories 1542-1689* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1972), pp. X-xi.
- ³² Priestly & Corfield, 'Rooms and Room Use in Norwich Housing, p.107.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp 111-2.
- ³⁴ Priestly & Corfield, 'Rooms and Room Use in Norwich Housing, p.112.
- ³⁵ Probate inventory of Thomas Darwell, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1677.
- ³⁶ Probate inventory of Thomas Gregg, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1712.
- ³⁷ Probate inventory of Robert Lydiate, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1761.
- ³⁸ Probate inventory of John Jackson, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1712.
- ³⁹ Probate inventory of William Kirkman, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1720.
- ⁴⁰ Probate inventory of John Byron, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1742.
- ⁴¹ Probate inventory of Job Hurstfield, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1742.
- ⁴² Will and probate inventory of Thomas cawley, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1722.
- ⁴³ Will of Randle Norman, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1627.
- ⁴⁴ Will of William Norman, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1636.

⁴⁵ See note 2 chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Will and Probate inventory of John Berkenhead, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1670.

⁴⁷ Probate inventory of Richard Berkenhead, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS1684.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Probate inventories of John Berkenhead, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1670 & Richard Berkenhead, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS1684.

⁵⁰ C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603 – 1714* (London 1974), p. 278.

⁵¹ Ibid., see note 10, Chapter 3.

Conclusion

The main themes of this dissertation are the relationships of non-élite members of local society with their community and physical surroundings; and the level, and nature, of the Runcorn area's economic and social isolation, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A statistical approach to this study would perhaps have allowed clear conclusions to be drawn, but probate inventories do not necessarily lend themselves well to this type of analysis. We could perhaps have compiled summaries which made definite statements about relative wealth, local fluctuations in livestock or crop values, levels of literacy, or the percentage of homes in the area which contained particular items. However, the uneven survival rate of probate inventories and their susceptibility to (sometimes wildly) inaccurate valuations, along with the occasional practice of removing goods before inventories were compiled and inconsistent appraisal techniques, could combine to raise serious questions as to the accuracy of any conclusions drawn, if a quantitative, rather than qualitative approach were to be adopted.

This point is illustrated by the omission of tobacco and smoking accessories from all but one (the latest)¹ of this sample's inventories. A statistical analysis could lead us erroneously to conclude that smoking was not a significant habit amongst ordinary people in the Runcorn area, during our period. The evidence provided by archaeology has shown that smoking was as popular in the Runcorn area at this time as in other regions. For some unknown reason, tobacco accoutrements were not commonly recorded in probate inventories from this area, but that does not mean that they were not present in people's homes. The case of Elizabeth Leathwood's estate is also illustrative of the pitfalls awaiting the statistical analyst of probate inventories. The value of her estate (£18-3s.-4d)

may suggest a sufficient, if not extensive, collection of possessions. However, if we consider the fact that two tenements, valued at £15, were mistakenly included on the inventory, and therefore the total value of her household goods was a paltry £3-3s.-4d, we would reach a different conclusion concerning her economic position.²

The qualitative approach adopted in this study has hopefully enabled us to gain a more reliable, if less wide-ranging assessment of the its main themes. Given that the area had been in economic decline for over a hundred years, at the start of our period (Edward IV had effectively halted maritime trade in Runcorn in 1481), it may be reasonable to assume that, due to a lack of outside contact, national trends did not develop as quickly amongst the area's non-élite, as in other regions, but was this the case? Local yeomen resembled their contemporaries in other parts of the country, in that they rarely branched out into other areas of economic activity, and when they did diversify, it was usually into some form of textile production. The cases of John Smith, the innkeeper (1766) and perhaps Thomas Grice, the ferryman (1636) being exceptions from this sample..

Tradesmen in the area also seemed to follow national trends (insofar as they may be ascertained).³ Most retained an agricultural interest, many a significant one, and the keeping of pigs seems to have been almost universal. A further, less common economic activity involved investment, whether into projects, or as money lent at interest. It appears that similar sums of money were being invested, or lent, by similar types of people, in Runcorn, to those elsewhere. It is often difficult to distinguishing investments from trade debts, especially in an economy, where credit was so widely used. Fortunately, a number of inventories from the sample provide detailed information about debts owed to (and occasionally by) the deceased. The probate inventory of Thomas

Runcorn (1677, figure 15, Chapter 3) is one such, in it, unpaid wages (of 12s.-4d) are listed. Given Thomas Runcorn's poverty (his entire estate was valued at only £2-9s.-2d), we may assume that this unpaid debt would have placed an enormous burden on him, leading us perhaps to conclude that the very poor had little redress in important matters such as this. Richard Acton's inventory (1669, figure 9, Chapter 3) also provides us with details of debts owing to him. Further details concerning how these debts arose is found on the reverse of his will, where he listed the debtors and the goods and services he had provided for them.⁴

Debts seemed to be an important aspect of widows' lives during our period. Perhaps widows and very poor men, experienced similar difficulties collecting debts, as is perhaps the case with Runcorn widow, Joan Smith (1639), who was perhaps lending for profit, and had debts owed to her worth almost seven times the value of her personal possessions (£58-15s. and £8-7s.-6d, respectively). It has been argued that widows could not prosper by the deaths of their husbands.⁵ The cases of Joan Smith and particularly Elizabeth Leathwood seem to be examples of widows, who suffered economic problems following their husbands' deaths. Conversely, Ellen Tarbuck's probate inventory shows that the family farm had thrived under her ownership, and that her husband's death did not inflict economic hardship upon her.

We may have expected to see few concessions to comfort, leisure and luxury amongst people, often with modest means, who lived in the area. Nevertheless we find such items in some of the lower valued inventories, for instance, William Helsby's looking glass (figure 24, Chapter 4); Thomas Gregg's Bible and dictionary (figure 23, Chapter 4); and Thomas Carter's clock (figure 18, Chapter 4). Ownership patterns of

such items as these, bear comparison with those found in other areas at this time, though not necessarily in response to the same forces. This last point is pertinent in the case of clock ownership, which, it has been argued, became popular in the Telford area (and perhaps others), because of an increasing need for awareness of clock time, due to industrial expansion and reorganisation,⁶ forces which were not fully at work in the Runcorn area until the very end of our period.

In addition to addressing the twin themes of individuals' relationships with their community and their physical surroundings, it was envisaged that evidence might be found in the probate inventories, which would assess the level and nature of the Runcorn area's seclusion, and isolation from events and trends, in other regions. Whilst ownership patterns of certain goods seem to equate with those in other areas, the goods listed as contents of named rooms in probate inventories from the Runcorn area indicate that the evolution of the parlour room, and (and to a lesser extent) buttery, began many years after it was completed in other areas. The late take up of the changing function of parlour rooms in the Runcorn area strongly suggests that, compared with their contemporaries, the local non-élite, were occupying less well developed dwellings, and following a less private (and perhaps less sophisticated) domestic. Taken as a whole, however, the evidence from the probate inventories in this sample indicates that, though the inhabitants of the Runcorn area, during our period, were perhaps insulated to some degree from certain developments and trends, they were by no means isolated from other regions, commercially, or socially.

Though maritime trade was slowly increasing, due to improvements to the Mersey Estuary, our period had all but ended, before the boom which would see Runcorn develop

into a manufacturing centre and port of some significance, and eventually swallow many of the surrounding settlements, including Weston (although Halton retained its own separate identity, to a degree, until the late 1960s). This boom in trade and industrial growth removed virtually all evidence of the activities that preceded it in the area, helping to reinforce the impression that Runcorn's history began with the canal boom of the late eighteenth century. In addition to providing evidence of economic activity and domestic arrangements, in Halton, Weston and Runcorn, the probate inventories examined in this study provide a snapshot of the lives of non-élite members of local society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and a glimpse at some of the forces at work in a relatively parochial and undeveloped community about to undergo rapid and radical change.

Notes to conclusion

¹ Probate inventory of John Smith, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1766.

² Last will and probate inventory of Elizabeth Leathwood, WI 1741.

³ W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (second edition, London, 1972), p. 155.

⁴ Last will of Richard Acton, CHESHIRE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE WS 1669.

⁵ O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her, A History of Women in Western Europe, Volume 1 1500–1800* (London, 1995), p. 228.

⁶ B. Trinder & J. Cox (eds.) *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford* (London, 1980), pp.100-101 &114.

Appendix 1.

Probate inventories in the sample

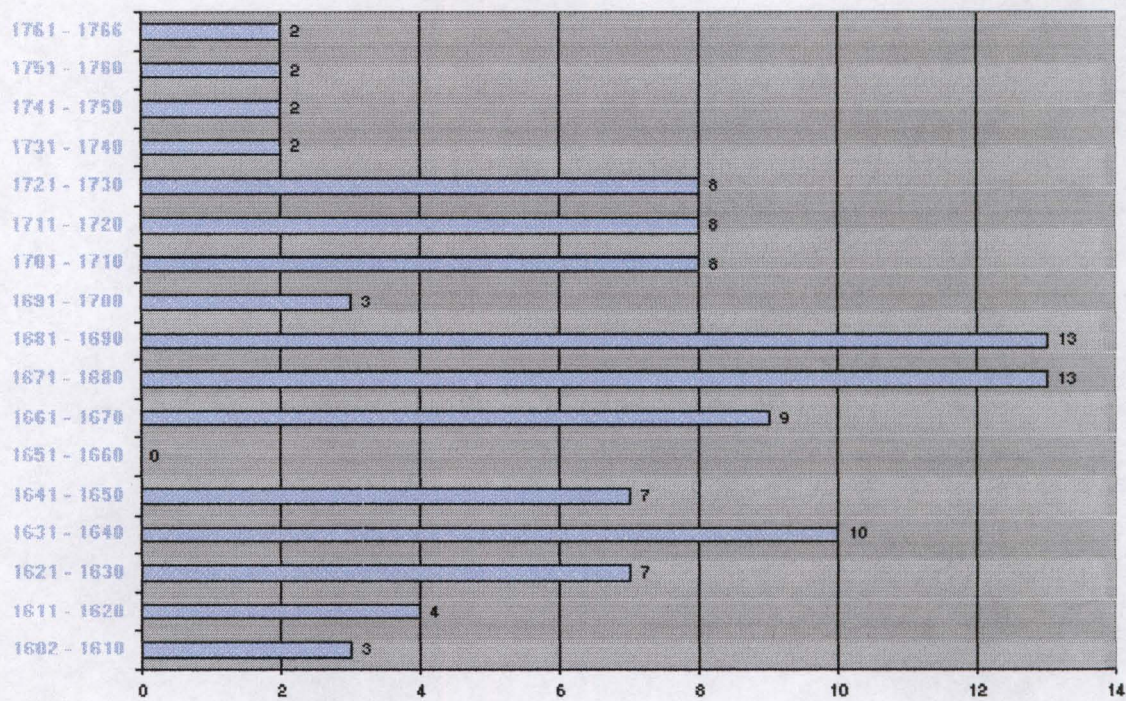
Cheshire County Record			Occupation
<u>Office Call number/ year</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Township</u>	<u>or staus</u>
WS 1602	John Houghton	Halton	yeoman
WS 1607	Edward Birkenhead	Halton	unknown
WS 1607	John Jackson	Weston	yeoman
WI 1616	Thomas Norman	Weston	husbandman
WS 1618	John Hough	Halton	blacksmith
WS 1618	Hugh Houghton	Halton	husbandman
WS 1618	Randle Berchenhead	Weston	yeoman
WS 1623	Richard Lydiate	Weston	wheelwright
WS 1623	John Birkenhead	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1625	Thomas Birchenhead	Weston	husbandman
WI 1627	Randle Norman	Weston	unknown
WI 1628	Robert Houghland	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1629	Richard Grice	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1630	Robert Houghland	Weston	unknown
WS 1630	William Malpas	Runcorn	webster
WS 1631	William Whiteley	Halton	yeoman
WS 1632	Robert Gregg	Weston	yeoman
WS 1632	Thomas Breck	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1633	Richard Breck	Runcorn	husbandman
WS 1636	William Hankin	Halton	unknown
WS 1636	John King	Halton	clerk
WS 1636	William Norman	Weston	yeoman
WS 1636	Thomas Grice	Runcorn	ferryman
WS 1637	Marjorie Whitely	Halton	widow
WS1638	Edward Kendrick	Runcorn	clerk
WS 1640	Joan Smith	Runcorn	widow
WS 1641	Richard Ryder	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1642	John Runcorn	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1647	Robert Cobnall	Runcorn	husbandman
WS 1647	Humphrey Johnson	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1647	Thomas tarbock	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1648	Ellen Cawley	Runcorn	widow
WS 1649	William King	Halton	clerk
WI 1661	Thomas Burtonwood	Weston	shoemaker
WS 1663	Thomas Cooper	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1663	Ellen Tarbock	Runcorn	widow
WI 1667	Ellen Povall	Runcorn	widow
WS 1669	Richard Acton	Halton	yeoman

WS 1669	Thomas Jackson	Halton	tailor
WS 1669	[?] Fletcher	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1670	John Birkenhead	Weston	yeoman
WS 1670	Thomas Grice	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1671	John Jackson	Weston	yeoman
WS 1671	John Parker	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1672	Joseph Davenport	Halton	unknown
WS 1672	Thomas Laithwood (Leathwood)	Halton	cooper
WS 1673	Thomas Ackerley	Runcorn	carpenter
WS 1676	William Houghland	Runcorn	husbandman
WS 1677	Peter Broskson	Halton	husbandman
WS 1677	Thomas Darwell	Halton	chirurgeon (surgeon)
WS 1677	Margeret Houghton	Halton	widow
WS 1677	Thomas Runcorn	Runcorn	carpenter
WS 1678	Samuel Johnson	Halton	yeoman
WS 1678	Robert Gregg	Weston	yeoman
WS 1678	Thomas Breck	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1679	John Malpas	Runcorn	clerk
WS 1680	William Lawrenson	Halton	husbandman
WS 1680	Robert Runcorn	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1681	Robert Lidiate	Halton	carpenter
WS 1681	John Buckley	Runcorn	husbandman
WS 1682	John Jackson	Halton	weaver
WS 1683	James Royle	Weston	yeoman
WS 1684	William Clotton	Halton	husbandman
WS 1684	Richard Birchenhead	Weston	unknown
WS 1684	Antony Lunt	Runcorn	unknown
WS 1685	William Banne	Halton	unknown
WS 1685	Thomas Cooper	Runcorn	husbandman
WS 1687	Thomas Breck	Runcorn	unknown
WI 1690	Richard Adshead	Runcorn	husbandman
WS 1690	Samuel Muskett	Higher Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1694	John Kerfoot	Halton	yeoman
WS 1699	John Broxon	Halton	unknown
WI 1699	Thomas Latham	Halton	yeoman
WS 1704	Jonathon	Halton	unknown
WS 1705	William Whiteley	Halton	husbandman
WS 1705	Mary Birkenhead	Weston	yeoman
WS 1709	Samuel Coppucks	Halton	yeoman
WS 1712	John Jackson	Halton	yeoman
WS 1712	Thomas Gregg	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1713	Thomas Bold	Halton	cooper
WS 1716	Samuel Burch	Runcorn	weaver
WS 1720	William Kirkman	Halton	yeoman

WS 1720	John Muskett	Higher Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1720	Catherine Tarbuck	Runcorn	widow
WS 1721	John Chow	Halton	yeoman
WS 1721	Mary Jackson	Halton	widow
WS 1722	Thomas Cawley	Halton	yeoman
WS 1722	Thomas Parker	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1723	Charles Lightfoot	Halton	unknown
WS 1724	John Chadwick	Halton	gentleman
WS 1729	Thomas Leathwood	Halton	shoemaker
WS 1730	Thomas Cawley	Halton	yeoman
WI 1731	William Helsby	Weston	blacksmith
WI 1732	Thomas Carter	Halton	shoemaker
Wi 1741	Elizabeth Leathwood	Halton	widow
WS 1741	Samuel Runcorn	Runcorn	yeoman
WS 1742	John Byron	Hatton	maltster
WI 1752	Job Hurstfield	Halton	millar
WS 1756 (WC 1771)	Thomas Jackson	Halton	cooper
WS 1761	Robert Lydiate	Halton	yeoman
WS 1766	John Smith	Runcorn	innkeeper

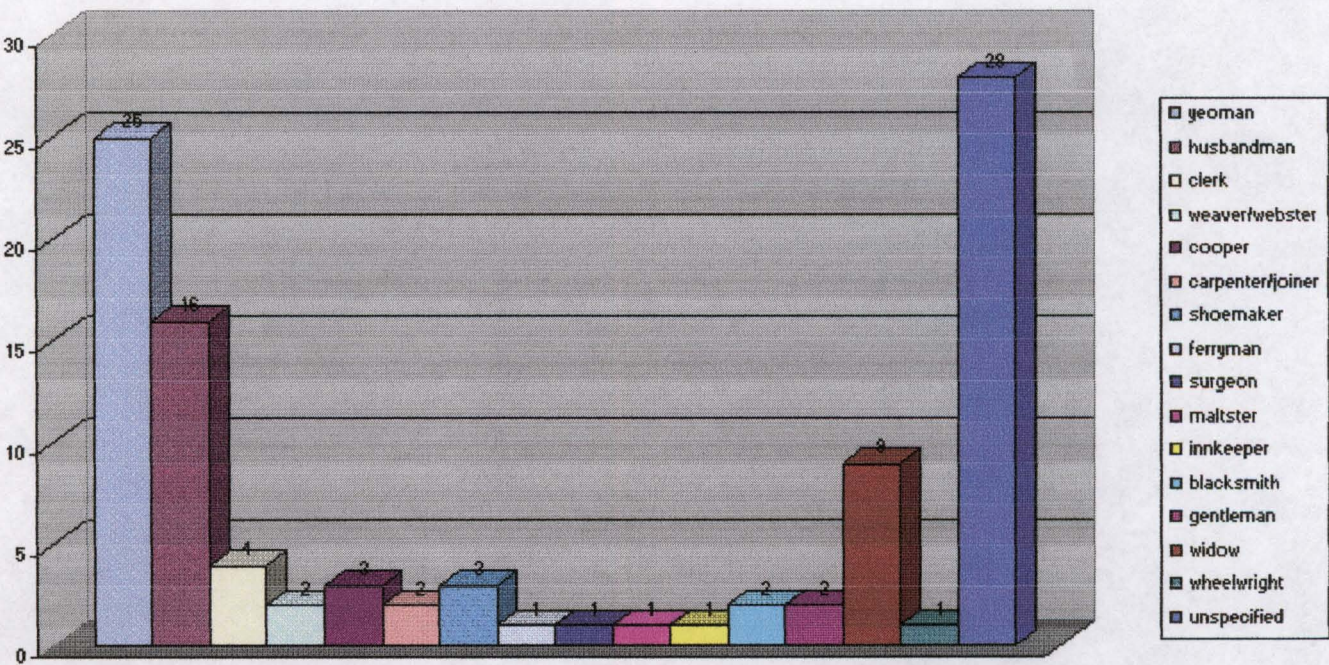
Appendix 2.

distribution by decade



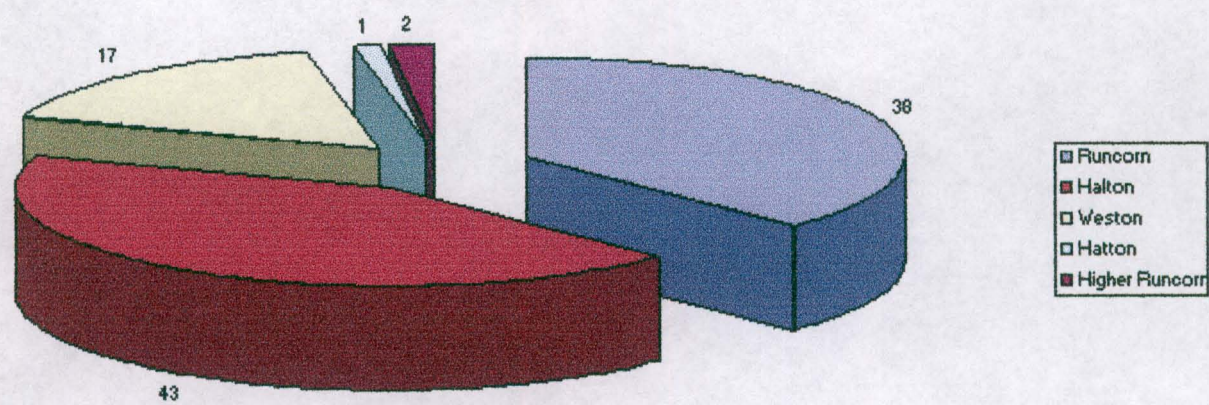
Appendix 3.

distribution by occupation/designation



Appendix 4.

distribution by settlement



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